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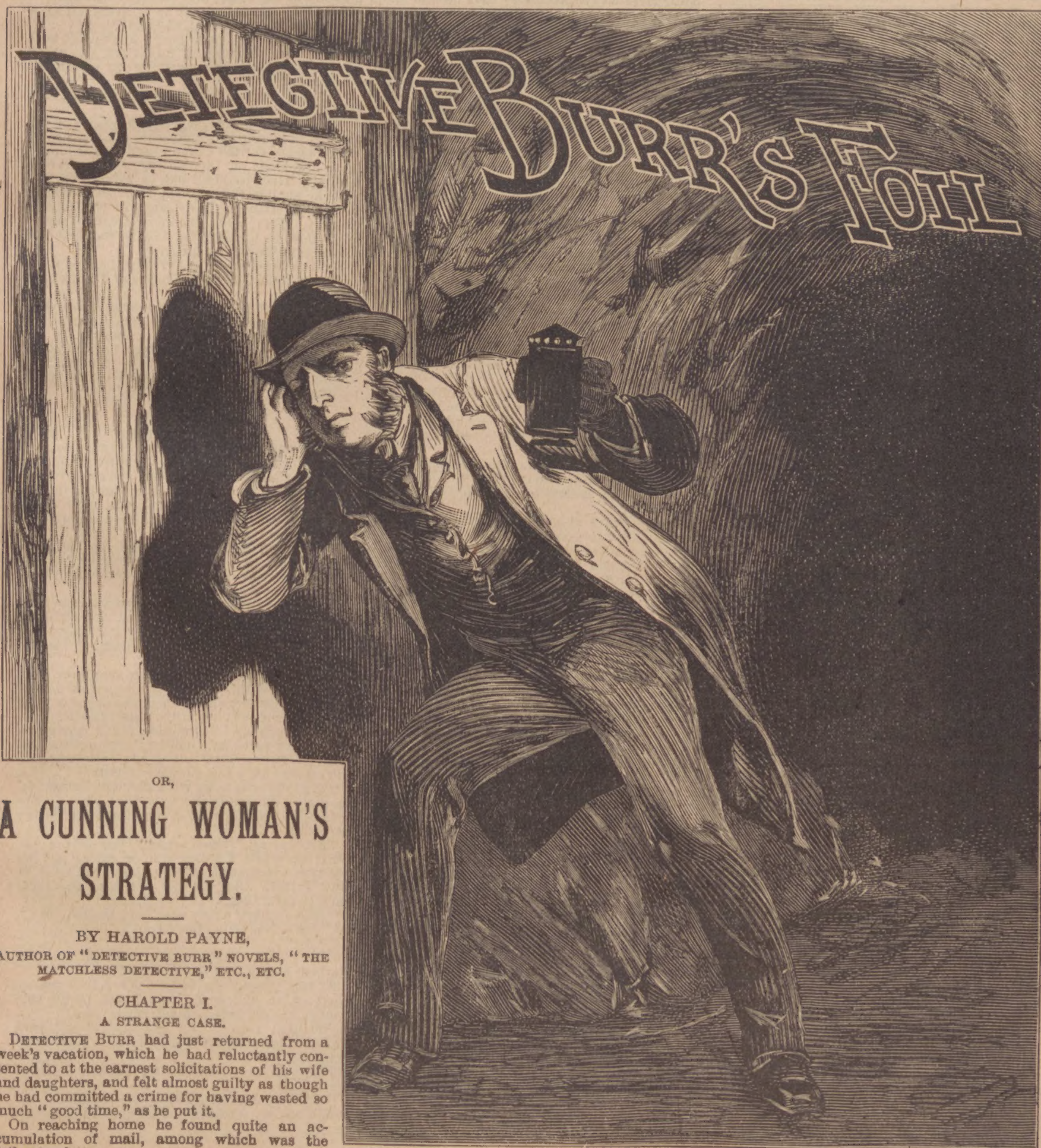
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OR,
**A CUNNING WOMAN'S
STRATEGY.**

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF "DETECTIVE BURR" NOVELS, "THE
MATCHLESS DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
A STRANGE CASE.

DETECTIVE BURR had just returned from a week's vacation, which he had reluctantly consented to at the earnest solicitations of his wife and daughters, and felt almost guilty as though he had committed a crime for having wasted so much "good time," as he put it.

On reaching home he found quite an accumulation of mail, among which was the following letter:

THAD LISTENED, AND DISCOVERED THAT THE SPEAKERS WERE APPROACHING.

"TEMPLE COURT LINCOLN'S INN.
LONDON ENG., Sept. 6, 18—."

"THADDEUS BURR, Esq., *Detective*,
New York City, N. Y. U. S. A.:-

"DEAR SIR:-

"Having heard of your remarkable success as a detective, we desire to secure your services in a cause which has been recently placed in our hands. We desire to find the address of one Harvey C. Templeton of Lychfield, Kent, who left England some twenty odd years ago, and is supposed to be somewhere in America—if still alive—and presumably living under a false name.

"His motive for leaving England was to escape punishment for the crime of murder which he is supposed to have committed, but our desire to discover his present whereabouts is not for the purpose of prosecuting him for this crime. In fact if he will consent to fulfill a certain obligation we promise, so far as we are concerned, not to molest or trouble him further. What we want of him is his signature to certain documents, which is necessary in order to recover a large estate of which he is joint heir.

"We further promise that, although he stands disinherited before the law so long as the suspicion of the crime hangs over him, we will secure to him the interest that he would have received had he been an innocent man.

"Do the best you can with this case, Mr. Burr, and advise us at your earliest convenience.

"Very truly yours,

"PENDLETON, BURWICK & SIMMS,
Solicitors in Chancery."

Thad was puzzling over this letter when, some time later, his wife came in to announce dinner.

"What's the matter, Thad?" she asked, noticing that his countenance wore a troubled expression. "Haven't you got over worrying about the loss of that week yet, my dear?"

"I had forgotten all about that, wifey!" rejoined the detective, looking up. "But I have something here that worries me a good deal more than the loss of a dozen weeks."

"What is it?" inquired his wife, seating herself on the arm of his chair and putting her arm about his neck.

"Look at this," he said, handing her the letter.

Mrs. Burr took the letter, read it through and handed it back to her husband.

"What do you think of that?" he continued.

"It looks as though your reputation had extended beyond the sea," she replied.

"That is not the point," interposed Thad; "don't you see the magnitude of the case which they have offered me?"

"I do not see that it is any worse than dozens of other cases which you have had, and in which you were successful, Thad."

"Then I must give you credit for less penetration than I thought you possessed, Clara."

His wife looked puzzled but made no reply.

"America is a big country," he went on, "and to hunt for a man in it, unless you have some clue to start with, is like hunting for a needle in a haystack. Then think what this task will be without so much as a description of the man, and the possibilities that he has changed his name!"

"I hadn't considered the matter sufficiently to realize the magnitude of the case, Thad," rejoined his wife, apologetically.

"There! there!" he cried, putting his arm about her tenderly. "Forgive me for speaking so impatiently. I have no business to bother your little head with my tedious affairs, anyway."

"But I desire to know something about them, Thad. A wife should always take an interest in her husband's affairs. My only regret is that my silly head won't allow me to be of some assistance to you."

"So you are, my love. You give me encouragement to push ahead when I would otherwise despair of success, and that is a good deal."

"Well, let us go down to dinner," interposed his wife, rising. "We can talk at the table as well as here."

"You are right, Clara, and I am as hungry as a wolf."

And arm in arm, they proceeded to the dining-room.

Thad and his wife both refrained from the subject for some time after seating themselves at the table, and discussed the ordinary topics incident to the household, but, after a while, his wife grew thoughtful, and at length asked:

"Do you think you will take the case, Thad?"

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I can do no less than try. There is one chance in a thousand of success. My first move will be to put a personal in one of the daily papers and see what effect that will have. If nothing results from it, I will try something else. Once I get the slightest clue to work on the battle is half won."

As soon as he had finished his dinner the detective went to the nearest up-town office of the *New York Herald* and had the following personal inserted:

"WANTED—The address of Harvey C. Templeton, formerly of Lychfield, Kent, England, who left England under peculiar circumstances, and is supposed to reside at present in this country under an assumed name. The subscriber guarantees that no action will be brought against the said Templeton for the offense with which he is charged, his only object for desiring the party's address being to

obtain his signature to certain documents, which is necessary for the recovery of a large estate in which Templeton is interested. Subscriber also pledges that said heir shall have his interest in said estate as soon as latter is recovered. Address Burr, 176 Herald Up-town."

On the afternoon of the following day Thad went to the office and found this answer to his personal:

"BURR:-

"In answer to your personal in this morning's *Herald*, I would say that if you desire the address of Harvey C. Templeton, please write to or call at 215 West Fifteenth street, Watson's bell.

"HERBERT BAILEY."

Thad knew the location of the house indicated, and knew that the neighborhood was none of the best, most of the people being of a questionable character. Still there were some honest people in the vicinity, but he was at a loss to guess whether the writer belonged to the latter or the former.

If to the latter, he was probably a person in very modest circumstances and the easier, therefore, to induce to do what was required of him.

There were two points, however, which caused the detective a certain amount of uneasiness and doubt. One was that the character of the note was such as to lead him to believe that the writer might be an impostor, and the other was that, while the note was signed with a man's name, the writing had every appearance of being that of a woman.

Still, there was a possibility that he was mistaken on both points, particularly the former, and the fact that he had received but the one answer stimulated the hope that the writer was no fraud.

And as for being a feminine hand, that might be accounted for in a dozen ways. First of all, it was not an uncommon thing for men, especially Englishmen, to have educated wives while they themselves were illiterate and employed their better half to attend to their correspondence. Or it might be that Templeton was absent, or sick, or dead, and his wife or daughter had taken it upon herself to answer the personal. Again, it was not uncommon for men to write in an effeminate hand.

With these bewildering questions harassing his mind Thad took a down-town car a few minutes after receiving the note, and in the course of another half hour paused in front of the number indicated in the note and rung Watson's bell.

After a short delay the door was opened and the detective ascended the stairs.

The flat was at the top of the house, and from the appearance of the one or two persons—women—he met on the stairs, he saw that the house was no better than the others in that immediate locality.

When he reached the top floor Thad found the door open and a very pretty young lady peeping over the railing at him. As soon as he got sufficiently near she asked in a subdued tone:

"Is this the advertiser?"

"Yes," replied Thad in the same whisper, whereupon she turned and entered the door leading into the flat, indicating that she desired him to follow her.

He did so, with the full conviction, however, that she meant no good.

But when he reached the neat little sitting-room, into which she led him, he soon changed his mind, for there he found what appeared to be an honest, hard-working middle-aged lady and a young man of possibly twenty-five, who was evidently a workman and had just returned from his day's labor.

At the young lady's invitation Thad took a seat, and after a few formalities, turned to the young woman and said:

"Had I not better see you in private regarding the matter about which we wish to talk?"

"No," she rejoined. "Whatever you have to say you may say here in perfect freedom. These are friends of mine."

This was a surprise to the detective, who imagined up to that moment that the old lady was her mother and the young man, possibly, her brother.

"Thank you," replied Thad, after a moment's hesitation. "To come to the point at once, then, where is this Harvey C. Templeton?"

"That I am not at liberty to answer just at present," responded the girl politely but firmly. "First of all, let me ask you who you are and what your object is in wishing to know the address of my—Mr. Templeton?"

As she asked this question she looked the detective squarely in the face, and he was impressed with two things. One was that the girl was remarkably handsome, and the other was that she possessed a subtle cunning rarely to be met with among her sex.

But keen as she was, she had not been able to keep one or two facts away from Thad. One of these was, that she was very nearly related to the man in question—probably his daughter—and another was, that she was attempting to play some sort of a sly game as an offset against the detective's shrewdness.

He determined, therefore, to give her no advantage in the start, and to play her a game in

cunning that she never dreamed of. Putting on a very serious face, he replied to her question:

"Well, miss, I see no reason why I should keep anything from you. My name is Caleb Lossing—"

"A detective?" she interrupted.

"Certainly not, miss. I am in the employ of a law firm in London who have the management of the estate of which Mr. Templeton is joint heir, and my sole and only object in wishing to know his address is for the purpose of securing his signature to some documents which is necessary, as I stated in my personal in the paper, for the recovery of the property in question."

The girl was silent and thoughtful for a moment, and then resumed.

"Wouldn't it do as well if you should place the documents in my hands and let me get him to sign them?" she asked.

"Decidedly not," rejoined Thad, decisively. "In the first place, I could not think of allowing the documents to go out of my hands, and in the next place, I would have no guarantee that the signature was genuine."

"But if it is properly witnessed by reliable parties and attested by a regular notary?"

"It would not be sufficient, for if I should let the instruments go out of my hands—which of course I would not—the fact that this man is living under a false name would preclude the possibility of his getting competent witnesses to his signature."

This was a poser for the girl; she evidently was disconcerted, for she changed color, moved uneasily in her chair, and became confused.

"How do you know that he is living under a false name?" she faltered, at length.

"It matters very little how I know, just so I do know it. In turn, I might ask you what motive you have for wishing to screen his whereabouts?"

"That I decline to answer at present," she said firmly.

"As I stated before, it is not the desire of the firm to prosecute this man—whom I guess to be your father—for the crime which caused him to leave England; on the contrary, we guarantee not only that he shall not be prosecuted, but that he shall have the amount of his interest in the estate without the necessity of leaving this country. This being the case, I cannot see, if he is now an honest man, why he should desire to conceal himself any longer."

Thad noticed that the old lady changed color and grew agitated at the mention of Templeton's crime.

"Perhaps if he were sure that this was your object, he would have no objection to making his whereabouts known. Unfortunately, he not only has no assurance of the fact, but, knowing the matter of the property to be a myth and a blind, he is pretty well satisfied that your motive is not what you claim it is."

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S CUNNING.

THAD was cornered for the instant. He saw that it was worse than useless to attempt to convince her that he was not what she chose to believe him, or that his object in wanting to discover the address of Templeton was not for the purpose of prosecuting him for the murder committed twenty years before.

He also realized that, although he had seen from the first that she was cunning, he had not begun to conceive an inkling of her accomplishments in that respect.

It was also evident that her companions considered her a mistress of *finesse*, for when he glanced casually at them after her latest remark, he saw that they were smiling at his expense.

This piqued the detective more than ever, and he determined to conclude his interview as abruptly as possible, and to show the cunning miss that he was something in that line himself.

"Inasmuch as I have been frank enough to tell you my name and calling," resumed the detective, after a little reflection, "perhaps you will answer me a few simple questions?"

"That depends upon what they are," observed the girl, with an arch smile that showed she believed herself mistress of the situation. "What are they?"

"First of all," Thad began, "you did not answer me when I asked you, or rather put the question inferentially, that this Templeton is your father. As you did not deny the fact, am I to infer that he is your father?"

"Suit yourself about that," she smiled.

"You refuse to answer, then?"

"I do."

"Very well. Perhaps you will tell me who Herbert Bailey is, if not yourself?"

At this question she burst out in a loud peal of laughter, in which she was joined by her two friends, the old lady and the young man.

"I shall take it for granted, then," said Thad, "that Herbert Bailey is none other than yourself."

This was the incentive for another burst of merriment.

"You're a capital guesser," she remarked, but would not say whether he had guessed correctly or not.

"Yes, I have something of a knack in that direction," replied the detective. "But I have one more question, and this one I see no reason why you should not answer honestly at least."

"What is it?" she demanded, curtly.

"Inasmuch as you refuse to give me the information which I desire, what was your motive in corresponding with me and asking me to call here?"

"That I cannot answer, either," she said, promptly, but colored a trifle. "Suffice it to say that I had my reasons."

"Undoubtedly, and I shall be surprised if I do not discover what they are before either of us is much older. And now," he added, rising, "as I have asked all the questions I desire to, and have received no satisfactory answer to any of them, I shall take my leave. But I will say before going, that if you desire to shield your father—which appears to be your purpose—you would do better to accept my proposition, for if I succeed in running him down without your assistance, and against his will, I do not promise the clemency guaranteed him in case he came forward and complied with our request."

"In other words, you will prosecute him for the crime with which he is charged, eh?"

"That is it exactly."

She smiled complacently.

"Very well," she responded. "Go on. We shall see how much you will gain by your scheme. Only be careful that you do not run against a snag. The penalty for blackmail is pretty severe in this State."

"I'll risk that, my young lady. I am rather too old to allow myself to be trapped by a felon or his confederates. Good-evening."

And Thad took his leave, feeling that his interview had been something of a failure.

He had made a start, however, and had gained a little information.

For one thing, he was satisfied that the young lady, if not a daughter of the accused man, was at least very nearly related to him, and that she had undertaken to stand between him and justice.

Another thing of which he was reasonably well satisfied was that she did not belong in the house where he had found her, or to the people with whom she was discovered. Her manner and dress all indicated this, and it pointed to another theory, and that was that this Templeton, if he was her father, was probably well-to-do, and that he would be found in an entirely different kind of neighborhood from that in which the detective had discovered his daughter.

The only thing to be done, then, was to watch her movements, as well as the silent pair who appeared to be her friends or confederates.

With these reflections the detective made his way to his rooms on Thirteenth street.

Once in his "studio," the detective made himself up as a fashionable young man, and, half an hour later, strolled down Fifteenth street in the neighborhood of the house where he had discovered the cunning little woman with whom he was about to begin the severest battle of his life—a battle, the weapons of which were to be wit and stratagem.

It had grown quite dark, and the street lamps twinkled along the way, but only partially dispelled the gloom.

Pretty soon he reached the house he had left a little while before.

All was quiet about the place, and many of the flats were still in darkness, but away up toward the roof a bright light streamed from the two front windows.

"I would give a good deal to know whether she is still there," he mused; "and whether she intends to leave to-night or remain in the house."

He had scarcely formulated this wish when he heard footsteps descending the hall steps, and sprang back into a patch of gloom caused by an angle of the building.

He had been none too soon, for, a moment later, two persons came out of the front door and descended the stoop.

One of the persons he easily recognized as the young man whom he had seen that evening in the top flat, but the other he could not make out.

It was evidently a woman, but she was so muffled that he could not tell whether she was young or old.

The pair started off in the direction of Broadway at a brisk pace, and as soon as they had got a little in advance the detective followed them.

They evidently had no suspicion of being shadowed, for they never once looked back, so that Thad had no difficulty in shadowing them without danger of being detected.

There was one thing of which the detective soon became convinced, and that was that the woman was as a young one. This he judged from the lightness and springiness of her gait.

When Broadway was reached Thad was pleased to see the couple take a street car, as this simplified his task much more than if they had taken a cab or hack. He lost no time in gaining the opposite side of the street and entering the car from that direction in order to prevent the pair from suspecting that he was following them.

They had already seated themselves in a corner of the car when he entered, and, without appearing to notice that they existed, Thad managed to seat himself next to the young man, with the girl on the other side of the latter.

The pair were engaged in an earnest conversation when he sat down, but in so subdued a voice that he could make out nothing of what they said.

Entertaining no suspicion that they were being spied upon, however, they soon grew bolder and raised the tone of their voices so that he began to catch a word here and there.

They both seemed to be in a high state of glee over something, and indulged in frequent bursts of laughter.

At length he could make out whole sentences, and discovered that he (the detective) was the subject of the conversation.

The first real tangible proof he had of this fact was the remark:

"Yes, Herbert, there is little doubt that he is a detective, and belongs in the city."

This was from the woman, and Thad had no difficulty in recognizing the voice as that of the young lady with whom he had had the interview that afternoon.

"And rather a stupid one, to boot," responded her companion. "It won't take much to outwit him, I'm thinking."

"No, that will be an easy matter. Our only difficulty will be to keep papa in the dark. If he should discover what is going on, ten chances to one he would give himself up."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, he is very nervous naturally, and I have noticed all my life that he has had spells of nervous apprehension which render him almost insane. What the cause of these spells was and the meaning of them were alike a mystery to me up to a week or so ago—strangely enough, only a short time before this man's personal appeared in the *Herald*."

"How did you discover it?"

"Through looking over some old papers of papa's. My first discovery was that his present name was not his correct one, and that led me to suspect that he had done something to cause him to change his name. A little more research brought to light the fact that he had committed a crime of some kind, in his youth, for which he had left his native land. I contemplated asking him about it and obtaining the truth, but my courage always failed at the critical moment, and I never did it. At length this personal appeared in the paper, and I made up my mind what course I should pursue. First of all, I would keep the matter from papa, and in the second place I would outwit the detective, or whoever the advertiser was, and cheat him out of his prey. But feeling that I should have a pretty big contract to handle alone, I secured the assistance of our friend Mrs. Watson."

"And why not me?" asked the young man in a hurt voice.

"I will do so with pleasure, if you care to help me," responded the girl feelingly. "It is always better to have a man in matters of this kind."

"Well, you ought to know, Ada, that nothing could give me more pleasure than to do whatever I can for you—if it was to die—"

"Sh-s-sh!" cried the girl, looking about apprehensively. "Don't talk foolish, Herbert!"

"I'm not talking foolish," persisted the young man. "Haven't you done enough for me? To say nothing of the fact that—"

"Sh-s-sh!" she admonished again. "Well, let it be understood, then, that we work together for the defeat of the detective and the screening of poor papa, guilty or not. Here is my hand."

At this they shook hands. This little scene had been conducted in so quiet a way that the casual looker-on, not knowing the purport of their previous conversation, would have imagined that it was a love-scene pure and simple. And as for the detective, he was too sound asleep just then to notice anything!

The two were silent a few moments, when the young man, who had been looking out of the car-window, said:

"Hullo! we've gone past our street!"

With that he arose and made his way to the rear of the car without apparently bothering his head about the welfare of his companion, who, however, followed him so agilely that she was off the car almost as soon as he.

Of course Thad lost no time in following them, only he got off on the opposite side of the car, and allowed them to get some distance in advance before pursuing.

He found that he was at that broad and elegant residence avenue, Fifty-seventh street, and the detective believed that he was now approaching the real home of his man, and already began to congratulate himself upon bringing what had seemed so difficult a problem at first to so speedy a solution.

Meanwhile he was making his way along the opposite side of the street only a little way behind the young lady and her escort.

The couple continued along this street for three blocks and a half, stopping in the center of the fourth block before a splendid mansion.

Here, to the detective's surprise, the girl bade her companion good-night—rather tenderly, Thad thought, and entered the house by way of

the basement door, while the young man turned back toward Broadway again.

This was rather astonishing to the detective. Could it be that the girl was only a servant, after all, and that her father was a porter, butler or something of the kind? This seemed plausible, especially as he was an Englishman. But just here Thad had a happy thought. He approached the house and examined the door-plate. It read:

"ARCHIBALD P. STOWE."

CHAPTER III.

LOOKS LIKE CLEAR SAILING.

THE moment Thad saw the name he recognized it as that of the junior partner of a well-known firm of jewelers down-town—Hazeltime, Wilber & Stowe, and it looked as though he was to have plain sailing for the future.

He would have only to call upon Mr. Stowe at his place of business and, after ingratiating himself into his good graces and disarming him of suspicion, state his case, without any interference on the part of the girl.

If Templeton and Stowe should prove to be one and the same person, his task would be an easy one. On the other hand, if the man he wanted was only an employee of Stowe, he could at least find out something about him.

Having arrived at this conclusion, the detective retraced his steps toward Broadway with the happy reflection that he hadn't done such a bad day's work, after all.

Early in the forenoon of the following day Thad, disguised as a business man, made his way to the jewelry house of Hazeltime, Wilber & Stowe, with the happy anticipation that he should soon be in a fair way to success.

But here he received his first set-back.

Upon inquiring for the junior partner of the firm, the clerk to whom he applied smiled and looked the detective over as much as to say: "What part of the backwoods did you come from?" and when he had finished his inventory, exclaimed:

"Why, my dear sir, you are a little behind the times. Are you not aware that Mr. Stowe has been dead for five years?"

Thad was compelled to admit that he was not aware of it, and was then informed that not a single member of the original firm was still living, the name being nothing more than a trademark for the present concern. This was such a common thing among the older houses of New York that the detective was not at all surprised at it, but felt a little cheap in the presence of the circle of grinning clerks who had by this time drawn around the speakers, and he managed to edge his way out as soon as possible.

This put an end to his first move, and he began to think that he had not struck as easy a case as he had at first imagined.

Who, then, he mused was this other Archibald P. Stowe? Perhaps he was some relation to this one—maybe a son?

But this reflection caused the detective's heart to sink. If the older man had been the veritable Templeton, and was dead, the case was at an end, and the sooner he discovered whether such was the fact or not, the better.

To decide this he would call upon the Stowe of Fifty-seventh street without delay.

Thad's present disguise, he argued, would be the very thing, and entering a carriage he was driven to the mansion on Fifty-seventh street.

When he gave his card (with a fictitious name on it) to the attendant, and asked if Mr. Stowe was in, he was delighted at the attendant's answer in the affirmative.

Mr. Charles Wardell—by which name the detective had introduced himself—was ushered into the drawing-room, a magnificent and sumptuously furnished apartment, and was rather pleased, a few minutes later, to see the young lady enter, but more so to note that she did not recognize him.

She courtesied politely and said in a soft, musical voice:

"You wish to see my father, I believe?"

"Yes, miss," responded Thad, rising and bowing. "Is this Miss Stowe?"

She opened her eyes a little at the question, and the detective realized that it was rather abrupt, but he was determined to make the most of this visit and learn all he could while there was an opportunity.

"Yes," she replied after a moment's hesitation and a change of color, which was another surprise for the detective. She also appeared to be a little confused as she sunk into a chair and kept her eyes riveted curiously upon his face.

"Rather warm weather to remain in the city, is it not, Miss Stowe?" observed Thad, by way of keeping up the conversation.

"Oh, yes," she rejoined carelessly. "Still, I don't mind. The seaside and country are wanting in interest for me. I prefer remaining in the city where I can do some good."

Thad wondered what she meant. Certainly she could not refer to the case upon which he knew her to be engaged.

Curiosity more than anything else prompted him to observe:

"You do not waste all your time, like most young ladies, in the pursuit of pleasure, Miss Stowe?"

"On the contrary, that is exactly what I do. Only I have my own ideas about what constitutes pleasure. It matters little to me what others consider pleasure, I derive a great deal of solid enjoyment out of making others comfortable and happy."

"You are a philanthropist, then?"

"Not in the general acceptation of the word. I spend no money in establishing public charities; but when I see any one in need, and struggling to get on, I help him to the extent of my means."

Before Thad had a chance to continue the conversation any further a gentleman entered the parlor, and the girl, after simply announcing that that was her father, slipped out of the room.

"This is Mr. Wardell, I believe," observed the new-comer, consulting the card which the detective had sent up.

"The same," responded Thad. "And I have the honor of addressing Mr. Stowe, I take it?"

"That is my name, sir," said the other, brusquely. "What can I do for you, Mr. Wardell?"

"I desire to have a little private talk with you, sir, upon a matter which nearly concerns you."

The man eyed Thad curiously for a moment, and the detective imagined he detected just the least twinkle of amusement in his eye, but was unable to account for it.

"Very well," rejoined the man, at length. "Let us go into the library."

And without another word he started toward the door leading into the hall.

Thad followed and they were soon ascending a stairway leading to the second floor.

As soon as Stowe's head arose above the level of the floor above, Thad saw him glance at somebody and smile, which was followed by a suppressed girlish laugh and the closing of a door.

The library was at the rear of the house, and the man proceeded directly there, followed by the detective.

Once inside and the door closed upon the two men, Stowe pushed a chair toward Thad in a careless manner and throwing himself indolently in another, said:

"Well, what is your story?"

Thad took occasion to study the fellow a little before replying.

He was a short, thickset man of probably fifty, with gray hair and side-whiskers and a low brow. His face was that of a coarse, ignorant man and his bearing that of a ruffian more than a gentleman. Thad could not understand it. He was more puzzled to see such a man among such surroundings and the father of such a daughter than he had been to see the young lady herself in the tenement among the common people with whom he had met her on Fifteenth street.

His analysis had consumed something over a minute, and during that time he had allowed the other's question to go unanswered.

The man did not appear to take any account of it, however, and never once so much as glanced in his direction, but kept his eyes fixed on some object across the room.

Thad at once contracted a great dislike to the fellow.

"What I wish to speak to you about, Mr. Stowe," began the detective, "as I remarked before, nearly concerns yourself."

"That's what you said," interrupted the fellow, with a growl.

"It will probably startle you a little at first," continued Thad, controlling his rising indignation at the man's insolence with an effort; "but if you will allow me to state my case without interruption you will at once see that you have no cause for apprehension, and that it will be to your immense advantage."

"I'm listening," growled the other without turning his head.

"Your real name, as I take it," pursued the detective, striving in vain to catch his eye, "is Templeton—Harvey C. Templeton."

"Um!" was growled, but no further emotion was manifest.

"The crime, or the alleged crime, for which you were compelled to quit England, is known to but few at this late day, and the chances are that should you desire to return, there would be nobody to molest you. But we have arranged matters so that it will not be necessary for you to leave New York."

Thad paused for his answer and to see what the effect of his words would have on the man, but was surprised to see that there was not the slightest change of countenance, and the man's reply consisted as before, of the grunt.

"Um. Go on!"

"What we desire, Mr. Stowe, is your signature to certain documents for the purpose of recovering a large estate in which you yourself are largely interested. If you will agree to have yourself properly identified so that there can be no question as to the genuineness of your signature, you will not be troubled further except to receipt for your share of the estate."

Thad became silent and awaited the other's answer.

Stowe also was silent, and did not deign to turn his face in the direction of the detective.

The latter waited several minutes for him to make some sort of response, but concluding that the man had no intention of doing so, Thad inquired:

"Well, sir, what is your decision?"

"Bout what?" with his head still averted.

Thad could have knocked him down with a good grace.

"About signing the documents," he retorted rather sharply.

"What documents?"

"The ones I have just spoken of."

"I don't know nothing about any documents."

"But, sir," and Thad had hard work to suppress his rage, "I have just explained what they are. They are certificates by which we—that is the law firm in England which I represent—hope to recover a large estate which is at present in chancery, and of which you will receive a large share. Are you willing to do as requested?"

The man for the first time turned and faced him.

There was an expression of mingled scorn and amusement on his heavy face.

"Say, what do you take me for?" he sneered.

"Do you think I'm so green as to be taken in by any green-goods game like that?"

Thad was dumfounded. The thought of being mistaken for a confidence-man had never entered his head.

For a full minute he was unable to respond, and the other must have seen his consternation, for he went on:

"You didn't think you was getting hold of quite so sharp a customer, did you?"

Thad saw that he was in a tight place, but determined to get out of it as best he could.

One thing was especially essential, and that was not to incur the man's ill-will any more than possible.

"My dear sir," protested Thad, "I shall ask you to sign nothing without first satisfying you that everything is regular, and guaranteeing your indemnity against prosecution no less than the assurance that you will receive your interest in the estate."

"I'll sign nothing, I tell you, and you are wasting your time in trying to persuade me to do it," rising and looking toward the door as a hint for Thad to go.

"Suit yourself, sir," rejoined the detective. "But, remember this: If I am compelled to prove your identity—and prove it I will, if not by your permission, then against it—it may not go so well with you."

The other laughed derisively.

"What can you do," he sneered, "so long as I stay on this side?"

"I can make your past career public and let the people whom you are now duping know who you are, and that you are masquerading under false colors!"

Stowe laughed again, but Thad imagined that there was a note of bitterness in his laughter.

"You will have to prove that first. But," and here his smile turned to a scowl, "you had better get out of my house before I put you out!"

And stepping back, the man picked up a heavy cane.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF AFFAIRS.

FOR an instant Thad was startled at the ruffian's attitude. He had come to the conclusion some time before that the man was a ruffian, but did not imagine that he was capable of such ungentlemanly conduct as this.

And the recollection flashed upon him, as he stood staring at the fellow during that short moment, of what the girl had said about her father to the young man in the car.

She certainly did not comprehend what manner of parent she had, or she would never have supposed for an instant that he was the person to voluntarily give himself up and confess his guilt.

It only took Thad a few seconds to make up his mind what to do under the circumstances. He saw that anything approaching reconciliation was out of the question, and decided upon another course—adopted his antagonist's tactics and smiled at his bravado.

"Well, my good man," he said, coolly, "do you imagine for a moment that you can frighten me?"

The other made no reply, but pointed toward the door with his cane.

"So you want me to go, do you?"

"I not only want you to go, but I'll make you go in about a second, if you don't do so of your own accord!" vociferated Stowe.

"Allow me to tell you that I shall not go until I am ready, and you will not compel me to go, either!"

Stowe shot a malignant glance at him, and the detective expected him to fly at him, but was ready for the assault. Thad knew that he was physically more than the man's equal and

had no doubt that he was more than his equal in activity. Besides, if it came to the worst the detective could use his pistol.

But to Thad's surprise, instead of flying at him, the fellow eyed him closely for several seconds and then turned abruptly and left the room.

The visitor expected that the host would soon return and that there would be trouble; so, under the circumstances, it would probably be better to get away before his return, but Thad resolved to look about him a little while he had the opportunity.

Casting his eye around, he saw row upon row of valuable books on the shelves and some fine pictures on the wall. For a moment this appeared to be all, but, as he looked a little closer, he saw something that aroused his interest.

It was a cabinet containing letters and documents of some kind, the door of which was standing partially open.

At the moment of this discovery he heard some one ascending the stairs—indeed, there appeared to be two or more persons.

For some reason Thad imagined that the key to the mystery which he was endeavoring to solve lay in that cabinet, and therefore, determined to find it, he strode across the floor, but had no more than reached the cabinet when some one put his head in at the door.

A glance showed the detective that it was not Stowe, but a much younger man, with an athletic frame and fierce aspect.

He glared at the detective, and then looked behind him as if in quest of some one whom he expected.

This did not prevent Thad from turning his attention to the cabinet, however, for he knew that there was no time to lose. Inside of the open door were several drawers, one of which was standing partly drawn out, and this was piled full of papers.

Thad cast his eye over the package of documents and almost the first thing he saw was a paper superscribed with the name of Harvey C. Templeton. This paper he hurriedly snatched from the drawer and succeeded in concealing it in his pocket before the man at the door turned his head in his direction again; so the detective started to walk innocently away from the cabinet, yet expecting to meet with some resistance when he reached the door.

In this he was agreeably mistaken. The man withdrew to allow him to pass, and when he reached the hall he saw Stowe, a scowl on his face, standing outside.

Thad was about passing the pair and making his way down-stairs, when the younger man whispered something to Stowe, which caused the latter to glance suspiciously at his caller, and then dart into the library like a flash.

A moment later, and before the detective had time to take half a dozen steps along the hall, Stowe came running back, and when he reached the door, he cried:

"Yes, he's got it! Stop him and recover it if it costs you your life!"

Thad had the start and made good use of his advantage.

A few strides brought him to the bottom of the stairs, and he was making for the front door, when the young lady glided out of somewhere, and, locking the door, drew out the key and disappeared!

Here was a dilemma for the detective.

To attempt to get out the front door was useless, and as the two men were descending the stairs the only thing to do was to stand and fight it out.

But they were two to one, and a hasty glance showed the baffled Thad that both men were armed with revolvers.

The situation was critical enough to warrant some desperate attempt to avoid the guns.

He glanced to the rear of the hall and saw there a door leading to the basement, but it was now too late to reach that, for the men had already reached the foot of the stairs and would cut off his retreat.

And then he had a happy thought: he would resort to stratagem.

Making a desperate dash toward the front door, to throw them off their guard, as he expected they dashed after him; then when they least expected it, he turned and darted toward them.

So sudden was this action that he had passed them, and had reached the rear stairway before they realized the situation.

He was now at the basement door, and was delighted to find the door unlocked.

Another moment and he was descending the basement stairs, but when half-way down he ran against a burly form!

It was very dark and he could not see who was in the way, but though greatly surprised Thad at once grappled with his assailant, whom he found to be a man, and a powerful one at that. With a desperate effort he succeeded in hurling him off his feet, but this he found, when too late, to be the worst thing he could possibly have done, for the fellow clung to him and carried the detective down with him.

The fall had stunned the detective for an instant, but he was not long in recovering, and grasped his antagonist by the throat with a

grip that soon caused him to loosen his hold, and in another instant Thad was on his feet.

But by this time the other two from above were upon him, and before he had time to avert an attack, one of them dealt him a stunning blow over the head with a heavy cane that felled him to the floor, but he was not insensible. He recovered almost instantly, and when they came at him again he was ready for them.

The man who had used the cane rushed at the detective like a mad Bull, and made a second murderous pass at his head with the cane, but Thad was too quick for him and grasping the cane succeeded in wrenching it out of the fellow's hand.

Thus he was armed for the fray!

The next instant the cane whizzed through the air and came down with a crashing thud upon the assailant's head, bringing him to the ground as though he had been shot.

It was the man whom he had seen at the door while he (the detective) was at the cabinet, and his companion was Stowe.

The latter, infuriated by the defeat of his companion, made a dash at the detective, and struck Thad with his fist. The detective easily dodged the blow, and, stepping back, swung the cane in the air, but before it fell his arm was clutched by a powerful hand, and glancing about he saw the man whom he had encountered on the stairs.

The detective now found himself set upon by two powerful antagonists, and realized that his situation was indeed serious.

For several seconds the two men showered fist-blows upon the detective; but he succeeded in backing off far enough to place them both in front, so that they could only come at him one at a time, and before either of them realized what his maneuver was to be, the deft detective landed a telling blow upon the neck of Stowe's companion, felling him to the floor in an insensible condition.

The fight was now more nearly equal, although the rough treatment he had received had already begun to tell upon Thad's strength.

Stowe came at him again, but Thad got in a blow that sent the man reeling to the floor.

The detective, now unhampered, made a dash for the front door, but only to find his escape cut off, for the door was locked. Baffled again! What was to be done?

If he could get back into the library he might effect his escape through one of the several windows which opened upon a yard in the rear.

It was a hazardous undertaking, but it was his last hope.

Nerving himself for the effort, he was soon bounding up the stairs.

He reached the door and was groping in the dark for the knob, when suddenly the door flew open; a heavy blow fell upon his head, and he fell back, insensible.

CHAPTER V.

A ROMANTIC ADVENTURE.

How long Thad remained unconscious he had no means of knowing, but it must have been a long time. When he finally regained his senses he was dazed and mystified, and for some time strove in vain to remember what had happened, and when it all came to him at last, he looked about, curiously, wondering where he was.

His first glance about him proved that he was not in the dark passage where he had fallen, and a little more investigation showed him that he was undressed and reclining upon a plain but comfortable couch.

His first impression was that he was in the hospital, and he marveled at the kindness of these people who had tried to kill him, sending him there.

But, he soon became convinced that he was not in the hospital, and when he was made to understand the real state of affairs, he was more astonished than ever.

As he lay there, gazing at his surroundings, the first object of interest that met his eye was an old lady, sewing, sitting at some distance from him, near a table, upon which was a lamp.

The face seemed familiar to him, but for some moments he could not place her. Finally, however, it all came to him: it was the same old lady whom he had seen in the flat on Fifteenth street!

What could she be doing in this place, he wondered?

But the next moment she turned her face toward him, and noticing that he was awake and conscious, arose and approached his bedside.

There was a kindly smile upon her face which led him to believe that she was not as vicious as her associates, at all events.

"Ah, you have awoke at last, have you?" she said in a motherly voice.

"Where am I?" were Thad's first words.

"With friends," she replied. "How do you feel now, sir?"

"Very well, thanks—except a strange feeling here in my head," he answered.

"Ah, that is from the—the—knock you received. It was very cruel, but you will soon be better now. Would you like something to eat?"

Now that she had mentioned it, Thad realized that he was hungry, and told her as much.

She went away, and soon afterward returned with some delicious broth, which he ate with a relish and felt revived and strengthened.

"You are very good," he said, as he handed the bowl back to her. "You shall be well repaid for your kindness, ma'am. But won't you please tell me where I am and how I came here?"

"I do not think you had better talk now," she rejoined. "Try to sleep a little. When you are stronger I will tell you all about it."

This puzzled the detective more than ever.

And then all of a sudden a horrible suspicion flashed over his mind;—was he a prisoner here?

The thought haunted him so that it was a long time before he could compose himself to sleep.

The question continually harassed him, why was it that these people, who had prevented his escape from the house on Fifty-seventh street, and had apparently tried to kill him, should take the trouble to bring him here—wherever he was—and take such good care of him? Why had not they simply thrown him outside and left him to the mercies of the police as soon as they secured the document, which appeared to be the incentive for their attack upon him?

"They must have some other object in view," he mused; "they do not want to be responsible for my death, exactly, and yet they are determined to prevent me from making any further investigations in the case of Templeton. But in that they will be deceived. I am now determined to go to the bottom of that case, if it costs me my life. I have the advantage of knowing the fellow by sight as well as the name under which he is masquerading, and my opinion is that he is a scoundrel from the word go. One thing appears certain, however, and that is that they do not wish to kill me, or they would have done it while they had me unconscious, so I have nothing to fear."

With this consoling reflection to soothe his perturbed mind, he fell asleep, and so remained for several hours.

When he again opened his eyes he saw that the sun was shining, and realized that he was much refreshed. The pain had entirely left his head, and, although he was still a little weak, the only source of discomfort he experienced was hunger.

Thad cast his eyes about in search of the old lady, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Thinking that she had gone out for a moment and would soon return, he decided to lie still and await her coming. But after waiting a long time and she did not return, he raised himself to a sitting posture and looked about him.

This enabled him to scan a portion of the room which had been concealed from him while lying down, and almost the first thing that met his eye was some one sitting near a window reading a book.

It did not take him long to see that it was a young woman and a very pretty one at that, but for some time he failed to recognize her.

He had not sat up very long, however, before the girl turned her head and, seeing that Thad was sitting up, arose from her seat and came to his side.

He now recognized her as Miss Stowe, and the discovery filled him with a kind of dread.

He must still be in the Stowe mansion!

And, if that were the case, there could be little doubt that he was a prisoner.

The young lady smiled kindly upon him as the old one had done, and asked him how he felt.

"Well," he replied. "Perfectly well, I thank you. The pain has entirely left my head, and, while I still feel a trifle weak, I am practically as well as I ever was."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear it," she responded tenderly. "I almost feared that you were—that it would be some time before you would be well. Shall I fetch you something to eat?"

"No, I thank you. I will not trouble you so much. If you will allow me to dress myself I will go out and get my breakfast, I think."

"Oh, no, I could not think of allowing you to do such a thing. I will fetch you something, and then—"

"Am I not to be allowed to go?" he interrupted quickly, believing that her pretended hospitality was only a subterfuge to conceal the fact that he was a prisoner.

"Not at present," she answered in the same soft, sweet voice.

But, whatever her motive was, she failed to reconcile the detective, who was rather angered than otherwise with her gentleness, which he still believed to be the kindness shown by the executioner when he brings a dainty breakfast to the prisoner whom he is soon to kill.

"I am to understand that I am a prisoner here, then," he observed rather sharply.

She smiled more gently if possible than before.

"Yes; that is what you are," she laughed.

Thad was silent a moment, and restrained his indignation with an effort.

"Miss Stowe," he began at length, "you are a lady, and I would no nothing to harm you for the world. But if you imagine that I am to be detained here without a struggle, you are mistaken."

"Struggle as you like," she laughed again,

"you cannot escape. You are completely hemmed in, guarded on every side."

Thad ground his teeth, at which the young lady laughed aloud.

"By whom?" he finally murmured.

"By the iron-clad and inexorable laws of hospitality," she answered promptly.

Thad was nonplused.

He never felt so cheap in his life. Moreover he felt ashamed of himself, first for allowing this simple little girl to outwit him, and second, for having lost his temper.

He was angry with himself, and as he gazed at the smiling, aggravating little mixx before him, he could hardly escape being angry with her also.

But he soon got the mastery of his feelings, and smiled too.

"Well, you have outwitted me this time, young lady," he admitted; "but I will get even with you before long."

"You are welcome to, if you can," she smiled.

"But you are talking too much upon an empty stomach. Let me fetch you something to eat and you may talk all you like after that."

And before he could offer any further protest she had darted away, and a little while afterward returned with a tray laden with a delicious little breakfast and a fragrant bouquet of flowers.

"There now!" she said, setting the tray down upon a chair near the couch. "Let me fetch you a bowl of water to bathe your face and hands in."

And away she went again, and soon returned with the water.

Thad bathed his face, and found the cold water grateful to his brow, which was still slightly feverish, and while he was in the midst of his ablutions an idea occurred to him.

When he went to the house on Fifty-seventh street he recollected, he was made up as a business man and wore a pointed beard and an iron-gray wig. Now as his hands passed over his face and head he found that both were missing. He was himself! Somebody had removed his disguise while he was unconscious.

The young lady must have guessed at what he was thinking about, for she laughed in a girlish manner as though it was the best joke in the world, and remarked:

"You miss your beard and wig, don't you, Mr. Burr?"

He was no less astonished that she should have known his name than he was at the loss of the articles in question.

"You see," she went on pleasantly, "when we found you unconscious we had no idea who you were. But, after we brought you here, and got a doctor to examine you, we, or rather the doctor, discovered that you were disguised and, fearing that you were some burglar or other notorious character, we sent for a policeman. He removed your disguise and at once recognized you."

Thad was horrified. The policeman had no doubt told them all about who he was, of course, which would spoil his whole scheme.

After a little reflection, however, it occurred to him that possibly the officer had not been so indiscreet, and decided to question the girl.

"He told you who I was, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, who am I?"

"Why, he said he didn't remember your name, but that he knew you to be a wealthy business man from England who was looking up the heirs of several large estates over there, and that you went disguised so that everybody would not know you, and especially to prevent the newspaper reporters from troubling you. He told us to treat you kindly and that you would pay us well for our trouble. That is not the reason we have taken care of you, however."

"How did you know my name then, little girl, if the policeman did not tell you?"

"As soon as the disguise was removed I knew that you were the same person who came here the other day to talk to me about papa."

"Came here?" Thad asked in astonishment. "Am I in the flat on Fifteenth street, then?"

"Yes; that is just where you are!"

"How did I get here?"

"Herbert brought you here at my request."

"Does your father know anything about this?"

"My father?" and she laughed a queer little laugh that caused Thad to wonder what it meant.

"No," she finally said, and Thad could see that she was biting her lips to keep from laughing.

"How is he?"

"My father?"

"Yes."

"He is very well, thanks."

The detective looked at her in surprise.

"But he was insensible the last I saw of him. Has he entirely recovered from his injuries?"

"Papa received no—oh, yes, he has quite recovered—he is much better now," she faltered, and try as she would her art was not sufficient to cover her confusion, and a suspicion grew up in the detective's mind. It was that the man whom he had had the encounter with was not

her father! But he said nothing to her about his suspicion, simply observing:
 "I am surprised that you are not with your father, if he is ill, instead of me."

CHAPTER VI. HOSPITABLE FOES.

It required all the girl's tact and cunning to dissemble after this.

Thad saw through her as though she had been made of crystal, and she was too sharp not to see that he saw through her.

Still, it would not do to admit that she was caught or even that she felt that she was, and after a severe struggle she succeeded in regaining her accustomed composure, and facing the detective as calmly as though nothing had gone on out of the common, she observed:

"While you are talking your breakfast is getting cold, Mr. Burr. Eat first, talk afterwards, is my motto."

"You are right, little girl," he responded, and applied himself to his breakfast for the next several minutes.

When the pangs of hunger were partially appeased, however, his curiosity to know certain things got the better of him again, and he resumed:

"You say that your father knew nothing about my being removed here, little girl?"

"He did not," and Thad saw that peculiar twitching about the mouth again, indicative of an irresistible desire to laugh.

"How did it happen, then? Was I removed while your father was still unconscious?"

"My papa wasn't—that is, yes, while he was unconscious."

It was now Thad's turn to laugh.

"It is hard work for you to be deceitful, little girl," he laughed. "I would advise you to give it up and tell the truth."

This caused her to blush crimson and grow confused again, and in order to cover this up she made an unsuccessful feint at being indignant at his remark; but it was no use. She was too full of fun to be able to draw a serious face for long at a time, and soon burst out laughing again.

"Never mind, little girl," continued the detective. "You know I wouldn't hurt your feelings any more than I would injure an infant. But tell me the straight of it. Of course I know, and you are aware that I know, that the man whom I met there at the house and who deported himself more like a cad than a gentleman, was no more your father than I am, but—"

"What do you mean, sir?" and again she attempted to assume indignation.

"Never mind," smiled Thad. "It is impossible for me to believe or for you to convince me that such a man as I met there could be the father of such a daughter. There is not the slightest resemblance anywhere. You are gentle, refined and intelligent, not to mention that you are beautiful, which you will forgive in an old fellow like me, while this fellow whom I met at the house on Fifty-seventh street is wanting in every one of these particulars. He is—"

"Stop, sir!" and she sprung to her feet and assumed a threatening attitude. There was no question about the genuineness of her indignation now. She was as mad as a hornet—too mad to proceed for several minutes, in fact.

At length she calmed herself somewhat, however, and continued:

"Why do you insult me by speaking thus about my father, sir? It is no fault of mine if my father is not just what you would have him, and I consider it cruel, mean, cowardly in you to take advantage of my weakness and his absence to speak of my father in this way!"

With that she broke down and began to weep.

Thad was at a loss what to make of it.

He was still far from convinced that this man was her father, and yet he could not account for her conduct.

From what he had seen of her it was hard for him to believe that she was dissembling entirely, and he was in a quandary.

Thad was too soft-hearted not to be affected by woman's tears, but he had had experience enough with the sex not to know that the best way was to let her have her cry out, so he remained silent and finished his breakfast, allowing her to sob until she was through.

When she had wept for some time, she dried her tears of her own accord, went and bathed her face and returned in as cheerful a humor as he had ever seen her, and she pressed him to have a second cup of coffee.

When he had finished his breakfast she removed the dishes, and the detective took advantage of her absence to dress himself. Then she came and sat down near him and chatted pleasantly on various topics, always avoiding any and all reference to her father, however.

At length Thad managed to turn the conversation in that direction again.

"You say that Herbert brought me away while I was unconscious, eh, little girl?" he observed.

"Yes, sir."

"Where did he find me?"

"In the basement."

"Were there not three other unconscious men there?"

"Not at that time."

"What had become of them?"

"They had been removed, all but Philip—I mean, they had all been removed up-stairs."

"Who is Philip, little girl?"

"Nobody—I made a mistake."

And she grew very red and became very much confused.

"One of the men was your father, of course?"

"Yes," very timidly.

"Have you any mother, little girl?"

"No, sir, my mother is dead."

Thad was thoughtful for some moments.

Finally an idea occurred to him which he thought he ought to speak about.

"You left here the other evening, Miss Stowe, and went up-town in a street car in company with the young man you call Herbert, did you not?"

The girl looked perplexed.

It was the first intimation she had had that anybody but themselves knew anything about that trip, and she grew alternately scarlet and ashen and became so confused as to be unable to answer for a moment or two.

"You remember going up in the car, don't you?" he repeated.

"Yes, I think I do," she finally faltered in a timid voice.

"Well, on that occasion, if you remember, you told Herbert that it was very necessary to keep this matter from your father, because if he found out anything about it, he would come forward and confess the crime of which he was guilty and give himself up. On the following day I met your father—that is if—I met your father, and found him as far from confessing as a man who had not been guilty of anything. How do you account for this?"

The same queer expression—an inclination to laugh—was visible in her face again, but she managed to disguise it better than she did on the previous occasion.

"I suppose that I was mistaken in him, that is all, she finally made out to say.

"You no longer have any fear of letting me meet him, then?"

"I wouldn't care to—no, I have no fear any longer," she faltered, at length.

"Notwithstanding the fact that you made your boast that you would outwit the detective and keep him away from your father."

The girl opened her eyes very wide at this, but made no reply.

"Well, Miss Stowe," Thad resumed, "I shall have to leave you now. How can I repay you for your kindness to me?"

"You owe me nothing, sir," she responded, sharply.

"Oh, but I do. I should not think of accepting your generous hospitality without paying you well for it."

"You owe me nothing," she repeated.

"Where is the old lady?"

"Gone out."

"Well, will you be good enough to give her this?" demanded Thad, in a kindly voice, handing her a ten-dollar bill.

"I could not think of such a thing."

"Why not?"

"Because, for one thing, she would not accept it when she knew where it came from, and she would feel hard against me for accepting it for her."

"Am I such a terrible wretch, then, that neither of you will accept my money?"

"Nothing of the kind. You were in trouble and became our guest, that is all."

"Your kindness and unselfishness exceed anything I ever saw. I wish I could do something to repay you."

The girl's face brightened.

"Do you really wish to do me a favor?" she asked, eagerly.

"I am more than anxious to," replied the detective, impressively.

"A great favor?"

"Yes. The greater the better."

"Then I will allow you to do it."

"What is it?"

The girl burst out laughing and could not answer at once.

"Do you promise that you will do whatever I ask you?" she asked, tauntingly.

Thad was about to answer in the affirmative, when a sudden thought occurred to him. She was trying to entrap him!

He hesitated, and finally said:

"Within the limits of reason."

"Then it will be no favor at all. If you feel the obligation you claim you do, you will not hesitate because the request is unreasonable. Anybody will do a reasonable thing for me. What I want is a man that will do an unreasonable thing."

For the first time Thad began to understand something of the girl's subtlety, and he was determined that she should not entrap him if he could avoid it.

"What is your request?" he asked.

"Oh, but you must promise that you will do it first," she insisted archly.

"That I refuse to do," rejoined the detective bluntly.

"Then you do not care to repay your obligation?"

"Not blindly. Young lady," he went on, "you are very cunning and I admire you for it; but do not over-estimate yourself. Do not imagine that you can cope with an old strategist just yet."

She laughed gayly.

"You think I am not equal to you, do you?" she laughed.

"I am sure of it."

"Very well, Mr. Burr, detective. We shall see who possesses the greater cunning of the two. I am glad now that you did not grant my request, for it would have deprived me of a good deal of fun."

Of all the surprises that the detective had had since going to work on this strange case, this was the greatest one.

How had she discovered that he was a detective?

Had the policeman after all betrayed him, or had she merely guessed the truth because he had been disguised when found in the basement insensible?

Still, he determined not to betray his surprise to her, as it would render her more conceited than ever. He therefore laughed it off good-naturedly as though he considered it an excellent joke, and soon afterward took his leave.

As soon as Thad was outside the flat it occurred to him to examine his pockets for the document which he had taken from the drawer of the cabinet, and which had nearly cost him his life. He had little doubt but that they had taken it away from him as they evidently intended to do, but when he put his hand in his pocket he was surprised to find the document still there.

This was a source of a good deal of satisfaction to him, and he felt that he had gained something by his expedition.

He had got about half-way down the stairs when he heard his name pronounced by some one at the top of the house, and looking back, saw Miss Stowe leaning over the railing with something in her hand.

"You forgot something, didn't you?" she asked.

Retracing his steps a little way he saw that the object in her hand was his false beard and wig.

"You'd better take them along," she observed playfully. "You will need them in outwitting Archibald Stowe's daughter."

And she tossed the articles down and followed the action with a merry lurch of laughter.

The next instant heads appeared at the door of every flat in the building, and Thad lost no time in getting down-stairs, after picking up his property, as he did not care to become too familiar to the people in the neighborhood, inasmuch as he would have to visit it a good many times in all probability while working up the case in which he was engaged.

He had just reached the hall door and was about stepping out, when he was confronted by Archibald Stowe!

CHAPTER VII.

A WOMAN'S KEEN EYE.

WHEN Thad met Stowe he expected nothing else than that he would have another encounter with the man, but to his surprise the latter stared at him curiously for an instant and passed on.

He then recalled the fact that he had been disguised when Stowe saw him before, and the latter could not be expected to recognize him now.

As Thad descended the stoop he glanced back through the hall door of the tenement and saw that Stowe was ascending the steps, and at the same time staring behind him at the detective.

This led the latter to believe that the fellow had recognized or thought he had recognized him, after all, but as soon as Stowe saw that Thad had observed his scrutiny he went on upstairs.

Thad did not trouble himself any further, even to reflect upon the probable reason for his going up into the apartment house, which under other circumstances he might have done, as it was rather an uncommon thing to see a millionaire visiting the tenants of a flat even to collect the rent.

At the present moment the detective had something else upon his mind.

Being pretty well satisfied from what he had learned so far that this person calling himself Stowe was not the man for whom he was looking, and possibly not Stowe at all, he had hit upon a plan to outwit this extraordinarily cunning girl, who appeared to be at the head of the conspiracy.

First, he would return to his studio and disguise himself in a different manner from what they had ever seen him and then pay another visit to the Fifty-seventh street house, taking advantage of the absence of Stowe and the young woman schemer.

To that end he hurried on to his lodgings, and in the course of half an hour or so, emerged, made up as a respectable old English gentleman with flowing side-whiskers and plaid suit.

In this guise he called a cab and had himself

driven to the house in Fifty-seventh street without delay.

Arrived here he ascended the stoop and rung the bell.

The small hall-boy who had admitted him before met him at the door, and the detective was gratified to see that he was not recognized.

"Is Mr. Stowe in?" asked the detective with a strong English inflection in his speech.

"Hi believe 'e his, sir," responded the menial, who appeared to be favorably impressed with the new-comer on account of being a fellow-countryman. "Step hinto the parlor, sir, ban' hi'll see."

"This looks more like it," mused Thad as he seated himself once more in the drawing-room to await the coming of the man he was seeking.

Scarcely had he finished this brief reflection when the servant returned to ask who he should say had called.

This had been an oversight both on the part of the footman and himself. He had sent up no card, and unfortunately he had neglected a very important item which he was usually most particular about. He had not a card about him that would serve.

"By Jove, this is deuced awkward, don't yer know?" he observed. "I came away from the 'otel without the sign of a card."

As he fumbled through his pockets in search of a card, pulling out one package of papers after another, he ran across the paper which he had taken from the cabinet in the library and which he had transferred to the pocket of the coat he now wore from the one which he had had on when he took the document.

Unfolding it absently and glancing casually over the contents, he ran across the name Harry Humphrey. He had not the least conception at that moment what connection the name of its owner had with Templeton, but on the impulse he turned to the waiting valet and said:

"I say, me good man, just say to Mr.—ah—Stowe, that his old friend 'Arry 'Umphrey is 'ere and desires to see him."

At the same time Thad slipped a dollar into the fellow's hand, thereby making himself more solid with him than before.

The menial bowed as though the detective had been his Highness the Prince, and withdrew.

His absence this time was somewhat more protracted, and Thad began to think that something was wrong, that his scheme had fallen through or something of the kind, when the menial at length returned and, bowing more obsequiously than before if possible, said:

"Me marster his hin the library, sir, and would be pleased to see yer h'onor."

Thad could not avoid chuckling inwardly at the thought of how neatly he was about to outwit the cunning little miss, and arose to follow the footman at once.

He ascended the familiar stairs as fast as the stately progress of the attendant would allow him, and finally reached the second floor.

So eager was the detective to reach the object of his search that he kept close upon the heels of the footman, much to the annoyance and discomfiture of that form-worshipping individual, who knew that the correct thing was for Thad to remain at least three paces in the rear, and finally, when they got to within a rod or so of the library door, the footman turned and indicated by a look which could not be mistaken that he desired the detective to remain where he was until he (the footman) should open the door and announce the visitor.

Thad humored him and paused until the footman opened the door, but when the latter was accomplished the footman turned and glanced at the detective with a look of consternation.

Thad did not at that moment understand the meaning of it, nor did he understand why the servant held the door shut.

A moment later he understood it all, however.

The door flew suddenly open and—Miss Stowe emerged!

She bustled up to the detective somewhat excited and asked:

"Whom did you wish to see, sir?"

"Mr. Stowe—your father, as I take it, miss," rejoined Thad, not forgetting his English inflection.

The girl eyed him suspiciously for an instant.

"What is your name?" she finally demanded.

"'Umphrey—'Arry 'Umphrey. Yer faither knows me well, don't yer know?"

"What do you wish to see my father about?" still suspiciously.

"As I said, miss, I'm an old friend of 'is, and I desired to make a friendly call upon him."

The girl stood irresolutely for an instant, and then turning toward the library door, said in a quiet voice:

"Come in," and pushed the door open.

Thad followed her, but when he reached the door where he could have a view of the interior of the apartment, he saw that it was empty. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere except the girl who stood before him.

He concealed his surprise from her, however, hoping that her father would appear later.

She motioned him to a chair and sat down herself directly facing him.

"Where did you know my father?" she asked, in a quiet, unimpassioned tone.

"In England, to be sure," responded Thad.

"How long since you have seen my father?"

"Let me see—it must be a matter of twenty years, I should judge, perhaps a little more."

"Did you know when he left England?"

"Not at the time. I heard of it a short time afterward, however, perhaps a week or such a matter."

"Did you know why he left?"

"Only from what I heard."

"And that was?"

"That he had done something—it is so long ago, I forget what it was now."

"Still, you knew that it was sufficiently heinous to compel him to quit his native land and friends and seek a home among strangers?"

"I presume I did at the time."

"And yet you are anxious to make a friendly call upon this criminal—you, who, I take it, are a respectable, honest man?"

"My friendship for your father," responded Thad, who began to see that he would have to deal extremely cautiously with this keen young woman, "was such as to preclude the belief in his guilt or the forsaking of him even if I had believed in it."

The young woman drew a deep sigh and looked in another direction.

"Such friends are very uncommon," she finally observed, as though speaking to herself.

And then to Thad's utter surprise, she burst out in a little rippling laugh, such as he had heard from her when he was coming up the stairs with her father on the previous visit.

Straightening her face again almost instantly, she faced the detective and continued:

"What name did you know my father by in the old country, Mr. Humphrey?"

"Templeton, of course," he replied, as coolly as he could under the circumstances.

"Have you never met him in this country?"

"No, miss."

"How did you ascertain that Archibald Stowe and Harvey Templeton were one and the same person?"

This was a poser, but Thad was not long in emerging from his dilemma.

"I saw an advertisement in the paper, some time since, which led me to suspect that your father was or might be in this city, and desiring very much to see my old friend, I made the acquaintance of several letter-carriers, and finally discovered that letters sometimes came addressed to Harvey Templeton, postmarked England, and that they were received by a man by the name of Stowe."

This was all manufactured, of course, to meet the emergency, and the detective had no idea what the effect would be.

He was somewhat gratified to note that the girl changed color and became agitated.

She struggled heroically to preserve her calmness, however, but was unable to conceal from the caller that his story had caused her a good deal of worry and apprehension.

It was evident to Thad that Stowe did actually receive letters from England addressed to his old name, or that the girl imagined from this statement that he did, and he felt that this was a good point to work upon.

Miss Stowe remained silent and thoughtful for so long that Thad finally despaired of her renewing the conversation, and, becoming impatient to get at the object of his visit, he continued:

"Where is your father at present, Miss Stowe?"

"My father?" and she started as though awakened out of a dream. And then apparently afraid that she had betrayed herself in some way she checked herself and said in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone:

"Really, I have no idea where he is at present."

"He is somewhere about the house, is he not?"

"I think not."

"But the servant told me he was, brought my message up to him and then returned to conduct me up to him."

The girl laughed roguishly.

"That incident," pursued the detective, "was pretty good evidence that your father was about, was it not?"

"No. The fact is, if I must confess it, the servant acted entirely upon my instructions. My father's health has not been very good of late, and I have denied all visitors. When the servant came up and informed me that an old English friend of my father was waiting to see him, I had a curiosity to see what that friend was like and told the footman to show you up."

"And now that you have seen what he is like, my dear young lady, what is the objection to allowing that old friend to see your father? I should like to see him above all things, don't yer know?"

Another one of those rippling little laughs disconcerted the detective somewhat.

"There is the greatest objection in the world, Mr. Humphrey," she laughed.

"And what is it, pray?"

"Simply this," and she arose to her feet and approached the door, "that you are no more Mr.

Harry Humphrey than I am, Mr. Detective Burr! You thought I did not know you, didn't you?"

Thad was too much astounded to speak.

He sprang to his feet and approached the door with the intention of making his escape, as he had no doubt that she had a regiment of ruffians within easy call as she had on the previous occasion.

She stood in the doorway and blocked his progress, but he was determined not to be taken at a disadvantage this time, and hurling her aside, sprang down the stairs. But, just as he reached the front door two formidable looking men stepped out in front of him!

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE-TO-FACE.

ANY ONE who has followed the checkered career of Thaddeus Burr is aware of the fact that he was never put down by trifles.

Indeed, it is doubtful whether he ever experienced the sensation of fear, as it is known to ordinary mortals.

But he was endowed with discretion, as well—with the discretion of quick intuitions and almost unerring judgment.

Consequently when he was confronted by the two murderous-looking ruffians at the door, who he knew would a little rather murder him than not, he experienced nothing of the trepidation which would have been natural for most men.

He was nonplused for an alternative, for a moment, and realized that a false step was likely to result in his death, and certainly had no desire to die just at that time and place.

He saw at a glance that the men "meant business" and that one of them was the fellow whom he had knocked senseless in the basement, a few days previously, and, whether or not the ruffian knew that he (the detective) was the same, and thirsted for revenge, the man's mettle and prowess, were not to be trifled with.

All this flashed through the detective's mind in a twinkling, and in that time he had made up his mind what to do.

To attempt to combat them fairly and single-handed would have been to court death, and therefore he must resort to stratagem.

Glancing right and left, he noticed that the drawing-room door was partially ajar, and, making a sudden movement, he dodged into the room, closed the door and locked it.

So unexpected was his action that the men were taken completely by surprise; but it did not take long for them to understand the ruse and recover their faculties, and an uproar followed.

They gave the alarm, and Thad heard footsteps along the hall, overhead, descending the stairs and, it seemed to him, in every part of the house, which proved that the house was swarming with enemies, so it behooved him to make his escape at once or the crowd would be upon him.

The only outlet to the drawing-room, aside from which it would be folly to attempt to escape, was a narrow door leading out somewhere in the rear.

He had not the slightest conception where this door led to, but it being his only alternative, a few strides brought him to it, to discover that it was locked, and the moment he attempted to turn the knob he heard some one walking on the opposite side.

Naturally supposing this to be some of his pursuers, he did not investigate any further, but before he had time to turn away, the door was cautiously opened by an old man—probably not more than sixty, but bent with care or disease so that he appeared to be much older.

The man stared at the detective in bewilderment, but appeared unable to utter a word.

"Pardon me, old gentleman!" said Thad, in a respectful tone; "but I should like to pass out this way if you please."

The man seemed more astonished than ever at this strange request, but at the same time appeared unable to refuse, for he mechanically allowed the door to open and Thad passed through.

The detective now found himself in a small room, which appeared to be used as a reading-room, as it was strewn with books in every direction, but besides a few easy-chairs and a lounge, there was no furniture.

As soon as Thad was inside the old man closed and locked the door again, and then turned and eyed the detective curiously.

In the mean time the latter was looking about for a means of escape from the room.

There was a large bay-window at the back which, upon investigation, the hunted detective found opened upon a garden, but there appeared to be no way of opening it. There was also a door leading into the hall; but, as he could hear footsteps just outside that door, the detective had no thought of venturing in that direction.

All this time the old man was watching his every movement with the greatest curiosity.

Finally Thad stopped before him and asked:

"Is there any way of getting out of this room, old gentleman, except by those two doors?"

Instead of answering his question, the old man asked:

"Who are you?" This in a quavering voice

which showed that the man was badly frightened.

"Why, sir," rejoined Thad, not forgetting his English character, "my name is 'Arry 'Umphrey, formerly of Lychfield, Kent, England."

"What?" and the old man almost reeled to the floor.

He stared at Thad with distended eyes and mouth for a full minute, and the color had all left his face.

"Yes, 'Arry 'Umphrey," repeated the detective calmly.

"Impossible!" gasped the old man.

"True, nevertheless, don't yer know?"

"My God! I thought you were dead!" again gasped the old man.

"No, not dead, but liable to be in a very short time if you don't show me a way out of here, old gentleman."

The reminder of Thad's danger appeared to distract his attention from the other matter, and he inquired:

"Are you in danger, sir?"

"Yes, yes, in great danger," cried Thad impatiently. "For God's sake show me a way to get out, quick!"

"What are you in danger of?" asked the old man, with aggravating inquisitiveness.

"Oh—the detectives," answered Thad, as the first thing which entered his head.

"Great Heaven!" cried the old man, excitedly. "I know what that is! I have been dodging them for twenty years, Harry. Come this way!"

And he led the way to the corner of the room behind a screen, and there, opening a panel, revealed a door from which a flight of steps descended somewhere in the darkness.

"Go right in there and keep on down. It will lead you to liberty. My house is honeycombed with these secret passages, and only for them I should have lost my liberty long ago."

Thad stepped into the passage revealed by the open panel, and the old man was about to close the panel, when the detective stopped him with a gesture.

"One moment, please," he said. "You are my old friend, Harvey Templeton, are you not?"

"No, no, no!" cried the old man, shuddering at the sound of the name as though it had been his death sentence. "I know no such name! I never heard of such a name! There is no such name! My name is Stowe—Archibald P. Stowe!"

And before Thad could reply, he had shut the panel and fastened it securely.

For several minutes after Thad had been shut out from this strange being, he could do nothing but stand and reflect.

That he had met his man face to face, there could be no shadow of doubt.

Knowing this, and now possessed of the history of the man—that he had been haunted for twenty odd years with the shadow of his crime—he did not wonder at the man's conduct, and felt a deep sense of pity for the poor wretch, guilty or not.

He had gained a strong point in meeting the supposed criminal and seeing what he appeared like, and also in learning the old man's disposition, but he also comprehended more fully than ever the difficulty he would have to surmount in getting at and convincing him that there was nothing to be feared in revealing his identity.

Added to the old man's half-insane condition was the girl's subtle cunning, fresh evidences of which he was receiving at every encounter with her.

He had perfect faith in his ability to win in the end, but the task, which had seemed so easy at first, now seemed almost insurmountable.

But his reverie was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the sound of loud, rough voices in the little room from which he had just escaped.

The men, failing to find the detective in the drawing-room, had evidently burst in upon the old gentleman, and were demanding where he had fled.

The question now was, would the old man betray him?

The chances were that he would, especially when he was informed that he had befriended a dangerous detective.

Therefore, the only thing to be done was to make his escape as quickly as possible.

Thad began descending the stairs.

It was very dark, and at first he considered it better to grope his way than run the risk of being detected, by lighting his pocket dark-lantern, which he never failed to carry.

Down, down, down went the stairs, and the deeper he went the darker and damper it became.

It appeared to him that he had gone to the depth of several stories, and must be a long way under the surface of the earth, and still there appeared to be no end to the interminable stairs.

Where could they lead, he mused?

At length he paused and lighted his lantern and holding it below him, peered down into the gloom.

To his great relief, he saw the bottom only a short distance below him, and lost no time in reaching it.

Here he found a tunnel leading off in two different directions.

He was in a quandary which road to take.

As likely as not one of them would lead him into some trap, and he wondered that the old man had not told him which one to take.

Possibly he had a motive in not doing so.

Who could tell? Perhaps the old man had sent him into this place as the easiest and surest way of disposing of him.

There was no reason to believe that the girl had not seen her father and told him what kind of a man to expect if he ran across the detective, and it was not to be wondered at, that he was quite as cunning as his daughter.

But he must decide; one of the passages must be chosen.

He listened but no sound met his ear.

All was quiet as the grave.

This reassured him somewhat, and, without giving the matter much thought, he took the first road that opened before him and proceeded to explore it.

The tunnel was very narrow and so low that he was often compelled to stoop. It was also very dark and damp, but these defects did not deter the detective, who pushed on now with all the speed he dared in such a course.

On, on he pushed, until it seemed to him that he had traveled miles, and he was beginning to wonder where the tunnel would end, or if it ever would, when he suddenly came to a full stop against some impediment.

A little investigation proved the impediment to be a door made of heavy rough boards.

Throwing his light in all directions about it he found that there was apparently no way of opening the door. There was neither handle or hinge in sight.

Still, Thad knew that there must be both somewhere, unless the affair was a permanent blockade placed there to stop up that end of the underground passage.

The thought that this might be the case was not encouraging. He did not relish the idea of retracing his steps along the dark tunnel for so great a distance, and the prospect of meeting the ruffians, and he began to investigate the door still further.

He threw his weight against it, but it did not move.

And, just then, he heard voices on the opposite side of the door!

He listened, and discovered that the speakers were approaching.

"Will they open the door?" Thad asked himself.

He listened intently, and the voices were still nearer.

The speakers were evidently brutal men, judging from their voices, and a slight tremor ran over Thad when he realized his situation.

By this time the men had reached the door.

And then—yes, they were unlocking it!

A moment later the door swung open and the light of a lantern poured in upon the detective!

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

THE men stared at Thad and he at them.

It was hard to tell which was the more surprised.

Possibly the men were, because Thad's appearance was evidently wholly unexpected to them, while he had heard them for a few minutes before they opened the door and so was not surprised.

A glance was sufficient to show the detective that these were not the same men whom he had encountered in the hall of Stowe's house, and that was a little relief.

Still, he could see that they were rough characters, and from the way in which they eyed him, he was in little better hands than he would have been with the others. Besides, there were four of these fellows and only two of the others.

A minute elapsed before either party spoke.

At length the man who was in the lead and who was carrying the lantern, said:

"Wal, what air you doin' in here, me covey?"

"Trying to get out, that's all," replied Thad coolly.

The man stared at him harder than ever and held his lantern up close to his face to see him the better.

"Say, old feller, you ain't no crack, are yer?" growled the fellow at length.

The truth flashed upon the detective at once. These fellows were cracksmen or burglars, and had, in some way, discovered this secret passage which they knew or imagined ran to the house of old Mr. Stowe, and had made up their minds to rob the old man.

Of course Thad knew that it was very little past noon, but that made no difference to the burglars. That was as good a time as they could select for robbing a rich man's house in nine times out of ten, as the family would either be out or at lunch.

Thad's mind was made up at once.

He would assume the role of burglar for the time being and see how it would serve his purpose.

"Yep," he responded. "But don't you fellers give me away."

This caused a roar of laughter among the crowd.

"That's good, that is," growled the leader. "The idee uv us givin' anybuddy away! I say, hev ye bin doin' anything in there?"

"Naw," growled Thad, making a wry face. "Was 'bout ter collar some swag when a gang come onter me and I hed ter skip."

"A gang?" and the three rascals looked apprehensively at each other. "What kind uv er gang?"

"Hard-bitters," rejoined Thad. "I reckon they're some chaps as the old man's got ter guard his place."

"Um! How many of the blokes was they?" asked the leader.

"Only two thet I seen."

"But yer heered more?"

"Yep."

"Where?"

"In the hall."

"Where was you?"

"In the little room behind the parlor."

"I know," growled the leader.

"Bin in there?" asked Thad.

"Yep. Done the place wunst. Didn't git rutbin' worth while though 'cept a broken arm."

"How was that?"

"Feller shot me."

"The old man?"

"Nope; anudder one. Kinder old, too, but not so old as de old man o' de house, see?"

"I know," said Thad. "I saw him too."

"Say," growled the leader, giving the detective another close scrutiny, "them ain't yer natural looks, is they?"

"What yer mean?" asked Thad.

"Them duds and them whiskers. Ain't yer fixed up fer de biz, old sport?"

Thad laughed and winked.

"I don't never go round so's folks'll know me de nex' time what they sees me," he laughed.

"Say, Doxy, yer must be a regular up-and-up."

"Wal." And the detective wagged his head after the manner of men of the ruffian's class when being flattered.

"Was yer thinkin' 'bout doin' the place ag'in?" asked Thad.

"We was a-thinkin' 'bout it," replied the leader, thoughtfully; "but ef things is as yer says they is, I'm afeared it won't hardly pay ter risk it."

"Pshaw! I wouldn't hev no fear uv tryin' it."

"Yer think thar wouldn't be no danger?"

"Not with three on yer."

"S'pose yer come 'long wid us?"

Thad was at a loss to know how to answer this proposition for a moment.

He didn't like to refuse point blank, lest the ruffians should suspect that he was not what he represented himself, and he would have trouble on his hands, and he knew too well that it would never do for him to go back with them, even with the hope of capturing them.

And so he reflected some seconds before replying.

The leader noticed his hesitation, and said:

"What, yer ain't afeared are yer?"

"Not exactly thet; but I don't b'lieve it'll do to go back in this rig. I'll go an' git another make-up and meet yer."

"Where?"

"Any place yer say. At ther house if yer say so, I'll tell yer the game. I'll go an' make up as er preacher er priest—"

"Priest is the thing," interposed the leader.

"All right. I'll make up as er priest and come in ther front way an' when I gits inter the house I kin let yer in. How's thet?"

"C'reckt as a die."

"Wal, I'll jest go out this yer way an' yer'd better leave the door open—that is, unlocked, so's yer kin git out ag'in easy, see? An' then go on through the tunnel till yer reaches ther stairs, climb up ther stairs till yer come to ther door and wait there till yer hear me knock."

"Good 'nuff," chuckled the leader of the ruffians.

"Don't fail," admonished the detective.

"Yer kin depend on us," growled the leader.

Thad then took his leave of the thieves, and proceeded on his way.

The tunnel soon opened into the basement of an old warehouse, which was little used, and which he afterward learned belonged to Stowe.

The detective had no trouble in leaving this place; and, once on the street again, he jumped into a cab and in ten minutes was at Inspector Byrnes's Headquarters.

Making himself known to the inspector he said:

"Do you want to make a haul this afternoon, inspector?"

"Always ready for that, Thad," smiled Byrnes. "What's in the wind?"

"I've got some birds caged ready for you, and all you've got to do is to close in on them."

He then related the circumstances of the intended robbery, omitting any reference to his own case.

"Very well," responded the inspector. "I'll

send as many men as you think necessary to do the job. But say, haven't you something on hand in that locality yourself, Thad?"

"Yes, the fact is, inspector, I have," and he proceeded to explain all about the case.

The inspector laughed.

"I knew they would be after you sooner or later, my boy," he observed. "A man who does the work that you have cannot fail to receive recognition some time. Go in and make the most of it, Thad, and if you need any help let me know. My whole staff is at your disposal."

"Thanks, inspector, but I am going to try to manage this little affair alone. I thought it would be better to have you attend to this other matter, though."

"Yes, that is rather a big job for one man; besides, it is hardly a detective job anyway."

The inspector then detailed eight of his best men, at Thad's suggestion. All jumped into a hack and drove at once to the corner of Tenth avenue and Fifty-seventh street.

Thad, giving the number of the house to the captain in command of the squad, told him to go to the house and ask for Miss Stowe, and when he saw her to tell her what was on hand.

The captain, promising to follow his instructions, Thad took the other four men and after showing them the entrance to the tunnel, ordered them to station themselves in the basement of the old warehouse near the mouth of the passage to cut off the retreat of the rascals, should the others fail to capture them in the house.

Thad then jumped into a cab and had himself driven with all haste to his studio, where he had the vehicle wait for him until he went up and changed his disguise.

When he emerged from his studio the driver did not know that it was the same man until Thad made himself known to him; and no wonder. The nobby English swell who went up, came down a priest of the Church of England.

He had himself driven back to the house on Fifty-seventh street again, and was admitted this time by the captain of the detective squad whom he had posted as to what his disguise was to be.

"Well, what success?" asked Thad as soon as he got inside.

"It's a dead failure," responded the captain despondently.

"How so?" inquired the detective.

"Why, the moment we opened the panel as you instructed, the rascals smelt a mouse and ran back. We followed them a little way, but found the passage so narrow and dark that we saw it was no use and gave it up."

Thad laughed.

"Are you sure that the fellows are not now in custody?" he asked.

"Of course I am. How could they be?"

"What do you imagine I did with the other four men?" asked the detective by way of answer.

The captain opened his eyes.

"Well, what did you do with them, Mr. Burr?"

"Stationed them at the other end of this passage you are speaking about. If those fellows escape I shall be surprised."

"Good!" cried the captain, cheering up. "I never thought of that. Let us go round and see whether they have caught them or not."

"You may go," responded Thad, "but I have a little business here to attend to."

He described the old warehouse and the way to find the entrance to the tunnel to the captain so that the latter could not fail to find it, and he took his three men and left the house.

In his hurry Thad had forgotten to ask the captain one very important question, and following him to the door, called him back.

"I forgot to ask you if you saw the young lady, captain," he whispered in the captain's ear.

"Yes, I saw her," the latter responded.

"Where did she go?"

"Why, at my advice, she took her father who appeared to be frightened nearly out of his wits at sight of the police, out of the way, and she said she would go up into the library with him."

"Very well, thank you. That is all." And the captain went away with his escort.

Thad then looked about, and seeing no one, not even a servant, in sight, ascended to the library.

He pushed open the library door softly and peered in, but to his disappointment, no one was there.

He went to the rear of the library where there was a door leading off into another room and opened that and looked in.

That room was also empty.

Leaving the library, the detective knocked at all the doors along the hall, but received no response. He then tried them and found them unlocked, but on looking into the rooms, he found each one empty!

"They have all gone down-stairs," he mused, and at once descended to the lower floor. But here he found the same state of affairs. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere.

He had been in every room except the little room back of the parlor, and concluding that

the old man and his daughter had gone in there, knocked at the door. He received no response. On trying the door, he found it unlocked, so he opened it and walked in. But no one was there!

What could it mean? How could everybody have got out of the house without the police seeing them?

At that moment he remembered the other branch of the tunnel.

CHAPTER X.

A BLIND LABYRINTH.

AS soon as Thad realized the true situation of affairs, he determined to learn more about the secret passages, and, if possible, discover the whereabouts of the missing members of the household.

He might have had Stowe taken in custody by the police at the same time they were capturing or attempting to capture the burglars, but he had two excellent reasons for not desiring to do so.

One was that, as he had told Inspector Byrnes, he desired to do the job alone; and the other was that he feared the consequences of taking the old man in his present mental condition. A very little would suffice to render him a raving maniac, and nothing would be so apt to bring about this unhappy event so quickly as having him taken in custody by what he realized to be a posse of policemen or detectives. It would have to be done, therefore, with the greatest caution.

And this was his principal reason for desiring to learn all the meanderings of the secret passages so that he could contrive some plan by which to capture the old man without the latter realizing that he was a prisoner, and then when he could get him away from the influence of his daughter and the rest, satisfy his mind that no harm was to befall him, and induce him to sign the document.

Thad passed out of the tunnel leading from the little room back of the drawing-room into the secret passage and, lighting his lantern, began the tedious descent of the stairway.

When he at length reached the bottom and set himself right about which of the two roads to take, he thought it expedient to put out his light and proceed in the dark, otherwise he would be seen by the fugitives long before he would discover them.

Shutting off the glare of his lantern, but not extinguishing it, so that he could flash it at a moment's warning, the detective proceeded to grope his way along the gloomy passage.

After he had gone some distance he paused and listened, but not a sound disturbed the funeral-like stillness of the underground passage.

On he pushed again.

For some distance there appeared to be no change in the tunnel and no particular difference between it and the other one—sometimes wide and high enough for easy passage, and sometimes scarcely large enough to allow him to squeeze through. But, after awhile, he noticed a decided change.

The tunnel not only became higher and wider, but there was an absence of the dampness he had felt before, and he also discovered that there was a considerable up-grade as though the passage were approaching the surface of the earth.

And now it began to curve and continued in this until the investigator was sure he had made a complete circuit and was at or near the same place from which he had started.

The detective pushed on, only pausing at intervals to listen, but no sound ever came to his ears.

It seemed to him that he had traversed miles—at least twice as far as he had gone in the other tunnel, and he was beginning to think that this one was some sort of blind labyrinth constructed for the purpose of losing beyond all hope the unfortunate who chanced to wander into it.

At length, however, he noticed that it was growing warmer and dryer, and presently the darkness began to grow less dense by degrees, until at length he could distinguish objects about him and even discern the color of the walls, which, he was surprised to see, were built of bricks.

For some time after this he could not make out where the light came from, but soon he noticed that the roof of the passage was made of roofing glass.

He had not traversed more than twenty yards after making this discovery when he came to a door—the end of the passage.

Unlike the door he had found at the terminus of the other passage, this one was constructed of thin, frail material similar to an ordinary chamber door, and the detective felt that if necessary he could break it down by throwing his weight against it.

This proved to be unnecessary, however, as the door was not even locked.

Turning the knob, he was surprised to see the door open, revealing—the identical little room back of the drawing-room from which he had gone nearly an hour before!

Thad was disgusted.

All his weary wandering about in the secret passage had availed him nothing.

He had spent an hour of valuable time, and was right where he had started from!

There was but one conclusion to be arrived at, and that was that the passage was so constructed for the purpose of misleading any one curious enough to follow it up, while it had connections or branches leading off in various directions which could only be discovered by those thoroughly acquainted with it.

After this discovery Thad did not consider it worth his while to attempt to find any one in this mysterious house, at least at the present time.

His only course would be to wait until the scare occasioned by his two previous visits and the advent of the police had blown over, and then adopt some new tactics.

With this decision he started to quit the house, but when he reached the main hall a noise on the second floor caused him to pause and listen.

He soon became aware that two or three men were up there, that they were of a rough character—judging from the tone of their voices—and that they were preparing to come down.

Supposing them to be the same scoundrels who had confronted him at the door that morning, Thad stepped back into the drawing-room and concealed himself behind a screen.

Scarcely had he got into this position, however, when his curiosity to see who the fellows were overcame him, and he emerged from his place of concealment and peeped out of the slightly open door of the drawing-room.

He could see the stairs from where he stood, and the three—that was the number—men were just starting down the steps.

A glance was sufficient to convince him that they were the three burglars who he supposed were in custody by this time, and from the size of the bundles they were carrying they had made a clean sweep of what was of most value in the house.

An idea occurred to him.

He knew the burglars would attempt to effect their escape by way of the tunnel, but in all probability the police would have gone from their ambush at the other end ere this and their escape would be easy if something was not done before the burglars got into the tunnel.

Thad stepped quickly into the little room where he had noticed a sideboard well stored with wines and liquors, and taking down a couple of bottles of good whisky, he uncorked them and introduced into their contents a portion of the contents of a bottle he always carried in his pocket.

The compound contained in this bottle was an admixture of his own, and was so subtle in its power over the human senses that a few drops of it were sufficient to put a man into a state of torpor from which he would not awake for hours.

The detective had no more than completed his compounding when the door leading into the main hall was opened cautiously and the burly head of the leader of the gang was thrust inside.

He scowled when he saw Thad.

"Ye'r a good 'un, you air!" he growled.

"V'at's de matter?" demanded the detective, laughing.

"Matter? Why, yer didn't do yer part, dat's what."

"It's mighty funny ef I didn't," rejoined Thad cheerfully. "You's de one dat failed ter go accordin' ter instructions."

"What d'yer mean?"

"I means dat yer come in der wrong way. I waited at dis door," continued Thad, pointing toward the first panel at which he had gone out, "an' when yer didn't come I went out ter look fer yer."

"Uh!" growled the rascal. "Yer see, we got inter a windin' kind of er passage dat we t'ought it would twist our heads off afore we got to de end of it, but it fetched up here."

"Wal, it was lucky dat I went through de udder passage," observed Thad.

"Why?"

"'Cause I found dat de place was bein' watched by the cops."

"What!" And the fellow turned pale.

"Dat's straight."

"Hear dat, boys?" growled the leader, glancing around at his pals. "De cops is onter us. What's ter be done?" he went on, addressing the detective.

"Simple es rollin' off er log," laughed Thad.

"What d'yer mean?"

"You boys set down here an' have a drop o' somethin'. I've just struck somethin' here dat seems all right. I'll go out an' reconnoiter. Dey won't suspect me, an' ef de cops is dere, I'll jest tell 'em dat ye've 'scaped de front way, see?"

"Good scheme," cried the ruffian gleefully, at the same time eying the two bottles which Thad had set out with a wistful mouth. "You're a brick, you air, an' ef yer git us outer this, we'll whack up on de swag, eh, boys?"

"Yep!" responded the other two.

"Set down an' help yerselves, boys," said Thad, "an' I'll glide out an' see de state o' de weather."

"Good 'nuff!"

And the three ruffians sat about the table and began to drain the drugged liquor.

In the mean time Thad stepped into the passage just outside of the panel and, seating himself, awaited results.

For several minutes he could hear the rough, swaggering barangue and boisterous laughter of the half stupefied ruffians, which in time began to grow weaker and weaker, and it was but a few minutes before all was quiet.

The detective then pushed open the door and peered in.

The drug had done its work.

All three of the rogues were fast asleep, one of them on the floor and the other two lying prone on the table!

Stepping in, he slipped the handcuffs on the three, and then left the house.

Hurrying around the corner Thad was soon at the old warehouse again where, to his surprise, he found the whole eight policemen waiting for the burglars to come out.

Thad laughed.

"Haven't you captured them yet?" he asked.

"No," growled the captain. "I'm afraid we'll all grow a beard if we wait for those chaps to come out."

"I'm thinking as much," laughed Thad.

"Well, old man, I've got them for you."

"What!"

"Come round to the house and take them away."

"What do you mean?"

"I've got the whole gang handcuffed ready for you. Better call a wagon to carry them, though. They are in no condition to walk."

Completely mystified, the captain followed the detective, accompanied by the other seven policemen, and in a few minutes the squad re-entered the house.

The place was still deserted, to all appearances, which led Thad to think that the family were pretty badly frightened, as they had not taken the precaution before going to fasten any of the doors.

Thad pushed on through into the little room, followed by the wondering detectives, where he found his captives still peacefully reposing just as he had left them.

The captain was thunderstruck.

"How did you manage it Mr. Burr?" he almost gasped.

Thad described the process, at the conclusion of which the captain observed:

"Well, you take the cake, Burr! If I am not mistaken those are three of the most notorious characters in the city and Byrnes would have given more than a thousand apiece for them any time!"

"Tell the inspector that he is welcome to the haul and it won't cost him or the city a red. I have but one favor to ask in return, captain."

"What is that?"

"If you can manage to see the young lady you saw here to-day, just explain the situation to her, and tell her that her best friend, Detective Burr, was responsible for the capture. I have a little ax of my own to grind."

The captain smiled, misinterpreting the detective's motive, of course, and promised.

The squad with their prisoners had not been gone more than ten minutes when the door to the little room opened and a stranger entered.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE OF THE FAMILY.

THE stranger paused suddenly when he saw Thad, mistaking him for an Episcopal minister, of course.

The detective smiled and bowed, forgetting for the instant the character he was playing, and in another moment would probably have said something a trifle at variance with his assumed character, had not the stranger spoken just as he did.

"Is Mr. Stowe not in?" he asked.

"Not at present," replied Thad, not wishing the stranger to know his business there.

"Have you any idea, doctor, when he will be in?" continued the other.

This caused the detective to remember the role he was playing, and he understood why the man had been so very polite.

"I have not," responded the detective.

"Nor his daughter?"

"I do not know where she is, either."

This caused the man to look a little surprised; but, after a moment, he smiled, and continued:

"Left you in charge of the house, eh?"

"So it seems," rejoined Thad.

"Philip is up in the library, I suppose, sir?"

Thad had as little idea who Philip was as if he had been a resident of the antipodes, but he answered complacently:

"Possibly."

"Thank you, doctor."

The stranger bowed and left the room.

Thad heard him climb up the stairs and open the door of the library. Pretty soon he heard him coming down again.

"There is nobody up there," he observed on re-entering the little room.

Thad could not suppress a smile; that had been his experience also.

"No?" was Thad's cool response.

The man hesitated a moment and looked at the ceiling.

"Would it be too much to ask you whether any of the family said where they were going?"

"They said nothing to me about where they were going," responded the detective.

"That is strange." And again the fellow was silent and thoughtful.

"Perhaps you can tell me—does the family belong to your parish, doctor?"

This was a poser, but Thad saw that he was in for it and must get out the best way he could.

He didn't like to tell the fellow that the family did belong to his parish, and yet he felt that if he did not he might miss some important piece of information, so he finally answered:

"Yes, sir, as much as to any parish."

"I understand. They are not particularly strict in church matters, anyway."

"I regret to say that they are not," moaned the detective, pulling a doleful face.

"Well, perhaps you are closely enough related to know something of their family affairs?"

"Perhaps."

"What I want to know is this: Some time ago I noticed a personal in a morning paper in which the advertiser desired to know the present address of Harvey Templeton, formerly of England."

"Yes?" said Thad indifferently.

"Do you know whether anything has been done in the matter or not?" asked the stranger.

"I do not. However, what has Harvey Templeton to do with this family?"

The man looked surprised.

"Oh, perhaps I am telling too much," he said in a stage-whisper.

"My dear sir, you have told nothing, that I have heard. You have simply asked questions since I have been in your presence. What do you mean by saying that you have told too much?"

"The fact is," faltered the man, "being the family priest, I did not know but you might have known about the affair."

"Possibly I do if I knew what you were talking about."

The man hesitated and looked at the detective as though uncertain whether to proceed or not.

Finally he continued.

"You must know it—"

"Know what?" interposed Thad.

"That—that Mr. Stowe has another name."

"Oh, is that what you are talking about?"

"Yes, sir. I was anxious to know whether they had concluded to correspond with this advertiser and secure the property referred to in the personal."

"Well, sir, I can assure you that nothing has been done in the matter."

"Are they likely to do anything?"

"I hardly think so."

"Why?"

"The old gentleman is afraid."

"Don't you think you could persuade him into it, sir? Priests usually have a good deal of influence over the members of their congregation."

"Possibly I might, and will try what I can do. But you appear to take a good deal of interest in this matter. Have you any interest in the property to be recovered?"

"I have. You see, this man is my brother. We are not on the best of terms. I know all about his secret and he has been keeping me quiet for a long time in one way or another. You see he is rich and I am poor."

Thad now noticed a slight resemblance between the visitor and the old man, only that there was a craftiness in this man's face which was wanting in that of the old man.

Thad understood what the fellow's character was, and although he despised him from the moment of the discovery, he determined to use him if necessary.

"In other words, you have been bleeding him, as the worldly man would say, for hush money," rejoined the detective.

The fellow grinned.

"Some might call it that," he admitted.

"The fact is, he is rich and should give me the money anyway, a good deal more than he does, but he wouldn't give me a red cent if he wasn't afraid that I would give him away."

"I see. He was charged with committing murder, was he not?"

"Yes. He killed his brother-in-law—his wife's brother."

"What for?"

"Oh, they had had a quarrel about some property. His brother-in-law never did like him, was opposed to his sister marrying my brother in the first place, and they were always disputing about something. Finally one day this man—John Shelton his name was—came to see my brother about some property of some kind and they had hot words over the affair. From words they came to blows, and finally my brother pulled out a knife and stabbed John to the heart."

"And then fled, eh?"

"Yes. He left England and went to Australia."

"Did his wife go with him?"

"No indeed! She wouldn't even join him when he wrote to her and requested her to do so."

"She afterward obtained a divorce, I presume?"

"No, she never would do that."

"Then he is a bigamist as well as a murderer."

"How do you make that out?" asked the other in surprise.

"He has another wife here, of course? But, perhaps he waited until his first wife died?"

"I do not know whether his first wife is dead or not, but I do know that he has never married since."

"I see. When he ran away he took his daughter with him, eh?"

"Daughter? They never had a daughter. They had but one child, a boy, and the mother kept that."

"This young lady here is not his daughter then?"

"Certainly not. Only adopted."

"Does she know that he is not her father?"

"I think not. It is his desire that she should believe him her own father."

"Does your brother know where his son is, at present?"

"No more than you do, sir. The mother disappeared shortly after my brother did, and nobody ever heard of her again. It is my opinion that she put the child and herself both out of the way. She was just the woman to do a thing of that kind."

"Well, you appear to be pretty well acquainted with the family history, and must have some influence over your brother to compel him as you do to give you money to live on; why do you not use your influence toward getting him to sign this document?"

"I could never do it."

"Why?"

"The moment I mention anything about our past or his old name, he gets crazy—crazy as a badbug. Why, he has compelled me to call myself by the same name that he goes by, for fear some detective will trace him up through me."

"He is a pretty tough case."

Templeton stared at the detective for using the slang, and the latter corrected himself and said: "As the worldly would say."

In his eagerness to get at the facts he had forgotten that he was impersonating a priest.

"I will see what I can do with him," pursued Thad. "By the way, do you know who this Herbert Bailey is?"

"Never heard of him."

"Who is Mrs. Watson?"

"I never heard of her, either."

"Are you not aware that the young lady is in the habit of visiting some people who live in a flat on Fifteenth street?" asked Thad getting excited again.

"Oh, as to that she visits poor people all over the city. My brother allows her a certain amount to spend in charity—I wish to God he'd give it to me, or half of it. I'm the best object of charity he ever saw. As I was saying, though, he allows her a certain amount—a pretty big one, too—to spend in charity, and she spends most of her time in strolling about looking for worthy subjects to bestow it on. A nice occupation for a young lady, eh?"

"A most worthy occupation," responded Thad warmly, having in mind his clerical character at the moment.

"But look at me!"

"Well?"

"If he gives me ten dollars a week, he thinks I ought to be satisfied, and yet she will give that much to some foreigner—"

"Let me see, you are an Englishman, are you not?"

"Yes, but that's different. She'll give ten and twenty dollars to some Dago or Irishman and his family just because he's out of work and can't pay the rent."

"Are you out of work, Mr. Templeton—?"

"Stowe, if you please."

"All right, Mr. Stowe. Are you out of work?"

"Out of work! Great heavens, doctor! Do you expect me to work when my brother has plenty for both of us? My father was a gentleman. He used to have a dozen servants to wait on him."

"Did your brother accumulate his property through work?"

"Oh, yes, I presume he did; but he's got it, don't you see? That is altogether different from starting in to make it. No, I'll be hanged if I'll work!"

Thad could not restrain his laughter at the fellow's earnestness and impudence.

Now that he came to look the fellow over, he saw that he was possibly a few years younger than his brother, but the careless, indolent life he had led had left him almost as young as though he had not passed his thirtieth year. He was neatly, though not extravagantly dressed, and showed indications of having been compelled to economize to some extent, and strangest of all, there was no sign of dissipation about the fellow. Summing him up, Thad put his inventory in the two words, lazy and mean.

"Well, I'll be going, doctor," broke in the other suddenly, jumping up and assuming a business air. "Do what you can in that matter, and when the thing is all settled up, and I get my share, I'll make it all right with you, you understand?"

"Very well, Mr. Stowe. Endow a school, I suppose!"

"Anything." And the fellow went off laughing at what he considered an excellent joke.

As soon as he had gone Thad prepared to leave the house.

But, just as he was going, Miss Stowe came in.

CHAPTER XII.

A PAIR OF EYES.

MISS STOWE appeared to be as much surprised to see the detective as Templeton had been, and he was satisfied from the inquiring look she gave him that she did not recognize him this time at least.

Nor did he intend that she should recognize him if it was within his power to prevent it; and to that end he changed his voice so completely that no one would have imagined that he was the individual who had appeared in another character.

He bowed profoundly and smiled sweetly at the young lady as he said:

"Good-afternoon, miss. I called in to see your father, but he does not appear to be at home."

She eyed him closely and, as it was her custom, suspiciously for a minute or so before speaking.

"No, sir, my father is not at home," she finally responded.

"Is he in the city, miss?"

"No, sir, he is not in the city," she answered at length.

"Ah, out of the city, eh? How long is he likely to be gone?"

"I cannot say."

This was said in such a short and snappish tone that the detective could not but wonder the cause.

Still, he did not allow her to see that he had noticed her abruptness, and proceeded as coolly as though she had given him the most satisfactory answer possible.

"Perhaps, my dear young lady," he pursued, "you will give me his present address so that I can communicate with him."

"I will do nothing of the kind, sir," she snapped.

Thad was astonished.

He could not understand the meaning of her conduct.

In the first place, he had never seen her out of temper before. She had always appeared to be the mildest mannered creature in the world. And again, he was surprised that she should act so rudely toward a priest, as she must have considered him.

"Thank you, miss," he said with mock suavity. "I shall take pains to inform your father when I do see him of the extremely polite and kindly manner in which his daughter received me."

"Indeed, I hope you will—if you ever see him."

And then to his utter surprise she burst out in that wonderful laugh of hers.

"You are very cunning, Mr. Burr," she laughed; "but you are not quite equal to Ada yet."

This was the greatest surprise of his life.

How was it possible that she had seen through his disguise? And was it possible, he asked himself, to invent a disguise that her sharp eyes could not penetrate?

"Very good," he laughed; "you have caught me once more; but the next time I see you I'll bet you a new dress you won't know me."

"I'll take the wager," she exclaimed. "By the way, I must thank you for the service you rendered us in capturing the burglars."

Thad opened his eyes. He had an idea.

"Aha, miss! I think I smell a mouse!" he cried.

She blushed deeply.

"Ah, you needn't blush! I see through your trick now. It was through Captain Conlin's eyes that you penetrated my disguise, and not with your own, bright as they are. You should keep quiet if you wish me to think you are real cunning."

For once she was off her guard. She could not, for her life, frame an answer to this accusation.

She would have given worlds to deny it if she could, but somehow the words would not come forth.

Finally she gave it up and ran into the room opposite the parlor and shut herself in.

Thad, seeing that nothing further was to be gained by remaining, took his departure.

It was growing dark when he reached the street, and that, together with the perplexed state of his mind, prevented him from noticing a figure standing just at one side of the stoop he had left, and which kept a close watch on the detective until he was some distance away, and then followed him.

Thad walked at a brisk pace as was his wont when his thoughts were busy, until he reached Eighth avenue, and there paused on the corner to wait for a car.

His shadower stopped on the opposite corner and maintained his watch upon the detective, but the latter was still too much abstracted to take any note of what was going on around

him and did not see the person in question, although the latter took no pains to conceal himself, apparently.

When the car finally arrived the detective boarded it and was soon moving swiftly downtown. Still he did not notice his shadower who had boarded the same car.

Thad was speculating upon how he was to get at the old man whom Ada was so cunningly keeping away from him, and wondering how much of her story about his being out of the city was true.

He confessed that his day's work had availed him little, but he was by no means discouraged.

In fact, he was more determined than ever to win his case, if for nothing else, to outwit the young lady who considered herself without a peer in finesse—too sharp for Thad Burr.

"The idea of an old detective like myself being outwitted by a snip of a girl!" he mused somewhat bitterly. "If I do not defeat her, I shall never call myself a detective again!"

But, do what he would he could not but feel that he had a formidable foe to contend with, and to feel a little bitter that she had held her own so well thus far in spite of his cleverest work.

At length the car reached Thirteenth street and Thad jumped off without waiting for the car to stop.

As he reached the curb, he instinctively cast his eyes back toward the car to see if anybody else had got off, and then noticed, for the first time, the man who had been shadowing him and who now jumped off the car.

Still, Thad had no idea that the fellow had been following him, nevertheless there was something about the man that caused the detective to give him more than a passing look.

Thad observed he was a young man, tall and spare but rather well-formed and more than ordinarily good-looking.

All this he discerned; then he passed on without giving the stranger any further attention or thought.

The shadower, however, appeared to give him his whole attention, and kept so close to him that the detective could not have failed to see him and to suspect that he was following him had his mind not been so utterly absorbed with other matters.

When Thad reached his lodgings he did not pause a moment, but at once passed up-stairs and into his rooms.

Fatigued and weak from his recent wounds and his season of unconsciousness, he decided to do nothing more that night, and so passed into his studio and removed his disguise.

While this was in progress it occurred to him that he had eaten nothing since early that morning and he became conscious of being extremely hungry.

After removing his disguise, therefore, he dressed himself in an ordinary street suit, and went out for his dinner.

When he again reached the street he was rather taken aback to see the same individual whom he had seen alight from the car standing at the edge of the curb only a short distance away from his front stoop.

The fellow appeared to take no notice of him when he first appeared, but seemed to be absorbed in something on the opposite side of the street. But his presence there annoyed Thad. He could not tell why. It was not an uncommon thing to see a man standing idly on the street. But there was something about this man that filled Thad with an indescribable dread.

The detective assumed to take no notice of the individual, and passed on, trying to forget that he had seen him.

But the fellow's presence seemed to haunt him.

He appeared to see him on all sides and even when he closed his eyes, and instinctively he felt that the man was following him.

For a long time he fought the illusion and refused to look back to satisfy himself; but the feeling grew so strong on him that the detective imagined he could hear footsteps behind him.

At length he could stand it no longer. The illusion was rendering him nervous, and he looked back.

Sure enough, as he had expected, there the fellow was, within ten feet of him.

Thad was angered.

What could the fellow want?

If he had been a shadower that understood his business he would have kept himself out of sight, and this led Thad to believe that he was some crank, possibly watching his opportunity to assassinate the detective.

Another thing that worried Thad was how the fellow knew that he was the same man that went up-stairs in the priest's robes.

This was more convincing proof than anything else that the fellow was a crank and was after some mischief, not caring very much upon whom it was inflicted.

Thad's first impulse was to turn upon his shadower and demand his motive for following him, but on second thought he decided to affect ignorance of his presence and watch his movements.

A few moments later the detective reached the restaurant where he was in the habit of taking his meals, and, passing in, seated himself at

a table. It was perfectly natural for him to look about him, and as his eyes scanned the various faces, he was more chagrined than surprised at seeing his shadower a few tables away, and with his eyes fixed upon the detective.

As he viewed him now in the glare of the light, Thad saw that there was a peculiarity about his eyes which he had never seen in human eyes before. Not only were they very large and luminous, but there was an expression which can only be described as hungry.

They seemed to want to devour or absorb whatever they fixed upon.

Thad had met a good many different people, but he had never before met one who appeared to exercise the influence over him that this man did.

His gaze filled him with dread, and actually affected his nerves!

It was in vain that he tried to avoid him by looking in another direction, the eyes were still there, no less vivid because they were imaginary eyes.

He would like to have shifted his seat so that his back would be toward his tormentor, but that would have been to acknowledge his dread or fear of him.

Thad was determined, however, to shut out the hateful vision from mind and eyes in some way. A man of extraordinary will-power himself, he felt ashamed of being overawed by what he now saw was a mere youth, and an effeminate one at that.

In his desperate effort at abstraction the detective pulled out the contents of his pocket in the hope of finding some paper of interest which he could read and divest his mind of the haunting presence of the mysterious stranger. The first thing he ran across was the document he had taken from the cabinet.

This document, the reader will recall, had lain in his pocket, strangely enough, for some days now and he had had no opportunity of reading it.

The moment his eyes fell upon the paper his whole mind was instantly absorbed in it to the exclusion of his shadower.

It turned out, after all, to be nothing but a letter addressed to Archibald P. Stowe, but was written by a lawyer who had used legal-cap paper, giving it the appearance of a legal document.

The letter was as follows:

"MR. ARCHIBALD P. STOWE (as HARVEY TEMPLETON):—

"DEAR SIR:—In answer to yours of recent date, I would state that under the circumstances you cannot blame your wife for not desiring to join you. Had the deceased been anybody but her own brother it might have been different. But in any case a sensitive woman like her could not repress a feeling of horror at the thought of living with a murderer. What you say about a wife's duty to her husband in times of trouble is very true; but circumstances alter cases. If the trouble were not of your own making she would be a worthy object of the severest censure if she did not stand by you; but knowing the facts as you do, it is not worth while for me to explain how differently the case stands.

"Regarding the other matter, that will be carried out as you request it. The property will be placed in the hands of responsible trustees pending your son's minority, and I would name Harry Humphrey as executor of the estate.

"Your wife is more than willing to comply with your request with regard to changing her own and the child's names that they may never be identified with your disgrace, but she absolutely refuses to accept the maintenance which you propose to set apart for her, declaring that she would rather earn her own living and that of her child than use your money. Women are strange creatures you know.

"Very respectfully,

"PHILIP THORNBURG.

"Counselor at Law."

This was the document, then, which had nearly cost the detective his life, and it revealed nothing and was of no particular value beyond establishing the fact that Stowe and Templeton were the same person, which he already knew.

CHAPTER XIII.

A REMARKABLE MAN.

BY the time Thad had finished the letter his dinner was served, but he was so much absorbed in reflection growing out of what he had read that for a long time he allowed his meal to go untasted.

There was nothing particularly new or startling in the contents of the letter. The date of it showed that it had been written twenty years before, but it was a kind of stamping with the seal of certainty facts which had only been theories or conjecture before.

One thing that particularly impressed him was the name attached to the missive.

"Philip Thornburg." Had he ever heard that name before? Or why was it that it associated itself in his mind with some one whom he had met, and who had not impressed him very favorably?

And then suddenly it flashed upon him.

The face and personality called up by the name was that of the man whom he had met on his first visit to the Stowe mansion—the man who had impersonated Stowe himself on that occasion.

Why it should have done so he could not

imagine, for he had never heard the fellow's name, and the only time he had ever heard the name of Philip pronounced in the house was when Asa Stowe (or Templeton), the dependent brother, had asked if Philip were up in the library.

While these thoughts were plaguing his brain, the detective absently raised his eyes from the paper before him, to discover the stranger's gaze fixed intently upon him.

Thad started involuntarily, which appeared to amuse the fellow exceedingly, for he laughed outright.

The man had apparently finished his meal—if, indeed, he had had any—and had come over and sat down at the same table with the detective.

The laugh was a peculiar one—a metallic, unsympathetic laugh, such as might have emanated from an automaton, and sent the cold chills over one to hear it. And the fellow's impudence was something startling.

He smiled impudently and stared alternately at the letter which the detective had been perusing and then at the latter's face.

And, to crown all, when Thad glared indignantly at him, and was about to demand an explanation, the fellow interrupted him by his own flippant remarks.

"Letter from your girl, mister?" he asked.

Thad did not deign to reply, but folding the letter, and returning it to his pocket, he devoted himself to his dinner, utterly ignoring the fellow.

"You needn't hide that letter in your pocket or in the iron safe—nor even the cabinet you stole it from—I can read it. My eyes can penetrate anything. Do you want me to tell you what that letter contains?" now came from the intruder, much to Thad's astonishment; but he did not betray his feeling, and responded quietly:

"Yes, young know-all, tell me what is in that letter."

The young man smiled complacently.

"It's very old, this letter. It was written in London, England, on March 4th, 18—, by Philip Thornburg, a lawyer, and addressed to Archibald P. Stowe, whose name seems to have been Harvey Templeton before he was married—no, before he did something—yes, I see now. He killed a man and changed his name."

He then went on and repeated word for word every syllable of the missive.

It was impossible for the detective to conceal his amazement—at which the young man laughed.

"Great chap, am I not?" he laughed.

"You are a great trickster," rejoined Thad contemptuously. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Oh, nobody in particular. My name is Augustus Merriman. Of course you do not want me to mention here who you are—although I know well enough!"

Thad was as much astounded at the fellow's powers now as he had been disgusted with his flippancy a moment before.

Of course he did not know whether the young man could really tell who he was, or whether the assertion was mere braggadocio, but from what he had already done Thad did not know but he might be able to do what he claimed, and he had no desire to have his name pronounced in that place.

"I have no doubt that you know who I am; hundreds of men in New York of whom I have not the least knowledge know me," was the detective's guarded reply.

"In other words," rejoined the young man, "you admit that there are hundreds of men in New York who know more than you do. A frank admission. But I'll give you my word of honor that I never set eyes on you before this evening, and nobody ever told me your name, and yet I can not only tell who you are, but your business and the very case upon which you are now working."

The detective was sure now that the fellow was a trickster, and had some acquaintance with the family of Stowe, as well as being in the confidence of the young lady.

The latter theory was the probable truth. The fellow was a close confidant, possibly a lover of Ada, and she had posted him on the events of the past few days and given him an account of the detective.

This would account for his surprising knowledge, but Thad was nevertheless curious to know more about the individual before him. If he was so free to impart his knowledge and knew as much as he pretended, he might be made useful instead of becoming a dangerous adversary.

"See here, young man," he began, "what was your object in following me from my room on Thirteenth street?"

"From your room on Thirteenth street? You mean from Stowe's house on Fifty-seventh street?"

Thad's question had been for the purpose of determining whether the fellow had actually known all his movements, and this answer settled the point.

"Very well, from the latter place then. What motive had you for following me in either case?"

Merriman again emitted that horrible laugh.

"I had an object. I may tell you—when we are better acquainted. I never like to make too free with strangers, you know."

"So I have noticed," rejoined the detective ironically. "You appear or assume to know a good deal about my affairs, and to know what I am doing—"

"The case you are working on?" interrupted the other.

"Yes."

"I know all about it."

"Perhaps you would like to assist me in the case, for a liberal consideration?"

"Liberal consideration? What do you take me for?" And the man made a show of anger that Thad would have thought impossible for him.

"Pardon me, but I never want a man to work for nothing."

"And I never work for money—that is, when I consent to work at all. I have all the money and more than I want. If I take a fancy to do a thing which will furnish pastime, I do it with as much relish as though it was to bring me millions."

"Well, do you think this would furnish you pastime?"

"Possibly."

"Would you mind assisting me?"

"I should be delighted to."

"Very well. If you know all about the case you know what I desire to do."

"Yes. You desire to get old Stowe's signature to a certain document."

"Right."

"And the old man is afraid your scheme is to entrap him in some way and get him back to England where he can be tried for the murder he committed over there."

Notwithstanding the fellow's perspicacity he had made one fatal blunder, and Thad was not slow in seeing it. It convinced the detective that Merriman's knowledge had been obtained in an ordinary and not extraordinary manner.

The mistake was in assuming that Stowe himself was afraid of being entrapped by the detective, when Thad knew that the old man had been persistently kept in ignorance of the facts, and did not, in all probability, suspect what was on foot. He knew that Stowe was in constant dread of being entrapped, and had a mortal dread of all detectives, but was probably ignorant of his (Thad's) very existence.

However, he did not propose to reveal anything to the young fellow which the latter did not apparently know, and pretended to assume that his theory was correct.

"All right so far," he said, nodding approval.

"The documents to be signed are not here, however," pursued the young man in a business-like manner, "and it will take a month to get them here, even if the attorneys on the other side agree to intrust them to your hands."

Here was another slip. Thad had already ordered the documents forwarded in anticipation of his early success, and the attorneys had cabled that they would be forwarded forthwith. They might be expected any day.

"No, it will not take a month," he asserted.

"However, what has that to do with your plan?"

"Everything. I can have the old man ready to sign within twenty-four hours; but what may happen in three or four weeks no one can tell. Stowe might die."

"All very true. But what assurance have you that you can induce him to sign within twenty-four hours or a week, for that matter?"

"Why, don't you see, I'm well acquainted with him—"

But here he suddenly broke off, colored violently and became confused.

He had evidently gone further than he had intended. In fact, he had gone far enough to reveal a secret which he would rather have kept to himself. But, although Thad had read the sentence to the end, he affected not to notice the mistake or consequent confusion, and asked simply:

"You are well acquainted with his what?"

"His disposition," answered the other, catching at the opportunity to dissemble.

"Oh. I did not know but what you were acquainted with that pretty daughter of his."

Merriman blushed and finally made out to protest:

"Why, no, sir—never saw her in my life—didn't even know that he had a daughter."

"No?"

"No, certainly not."

"Didn't know but you might. You see it is so common for young men to be acquainted with young women. Now, when can I see you, Mr. Merriman?"

"Any time. To-morrow if you like."

"Very well; say to-morrow afternoon. Where shall I call?"

"Had I not better call upon you?"

"No," replied Thad emphatically. "I will have nobody call upon me. That is against my rules."

"Just as you say. Call at the Hoffman House."

"The room?"

"They will tell you the room. Inquire of the clerk."

"All right, I will be there about two o'clock."

"That will suit me to a T. By the way, don't lunch till you get there and lunch with me."

"Thank you," said Thad.

Merriman then took his leave.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INTERRUPTED GAME.

"WELL, that is as strange a duck as I ever remember to have run across," mused the detective, as Merriman strode away from him. "I do not know whether to set him down as a champion liar, or whether he is in possession of some important facts. The former would probably come nearer covering the ground. By the way, I just think I'll shadow the chap and see where he goes."

With that he called the waiter, paid his bill and hurried out, although he had scarcely tasted his meal.

He thought he had tarried too long, for when he got outside his man was nowhere to be seen, but on going a little way along the street Thad espied him on an opposite corner where he had been standing and where he had just been joined by another man. When the detective caught sight of them they were just moving away along Fourteenth street.

Thad followed at a safe distance, keeping himself in the shadow as much as possible, although this seemed unnecessary, as the two men did not once look back or in any other direction to ascertain whether they were being followed or not.

They appeared to be engaged in earnest conversation, and Merriman's companion particularly frequently stopped to explain something with the most extravagant gestures. Thus they made slow progress and the detective nearly lost his patience several times waiting for them to move on, as the hour was getting late and he desired to get back to his lodgings and retire.

Several times he was on the point of abandoning the chase, but as often his curiosity to find out something about the strange creature, impelled him to continue. On and on they went, passing one street after another, and finally Thad found himself far down on the East side of the city and in one of its worst neighborhoods.

Where could this aristocratic young man who boasted of having more money than he wanted, be going in this direction?

Squalid tenements, dirty women and children and drunken men were among the edifying sights that met the eye.

Finally Thad was surprised to see the two men enter a cheap restaurant, and as he watched them through the dirty window, saw them seat themselves at a table and order a very modest meal.

Had his eyes told him the truth?

Surely this was not the same man he had been conversing with in one of the most expensive cafes on Broadway, and the man who claimed to stop at the Hoffman House!

He was undoubtedly a fraud attempting to work some scheme on the detective, and the latter was disgusted that he had taken interest enough in him to follow him as far as he had.

Thad was about to turn away in disgust, when it occurred to him to ascertain who the fellow's companion was.

Walking past the restaurant he tried from every angle to catch a glimpse of his face; but it was a failure. The man had his back to the door.

All he could make out was that he was well dressed, and that his hair was slightly gray.

Thad's only chance of seeing his man was by waiting outside until he came out—which he decided to do.

As he waited he naturally glanced about for something to employ his mind, and his eye fell upon the dirty, fly-blown signs that hung outside the door of the restaurant, and he saw that the price of a regular meal in the place was only fifteen cents.

This caused the detective to wonder still more that Merriman should come to such a place to dine, as the fare must be something disgusting.

The two men now came out of the restaurant. Thad had a good view of Merriman's companion's face now, and was as much astonished as he had been to see Merriman go into the cheap resort.

It was Asa Templeton, the brother of the old man!

No wonder he grumbled that his brother did not give him enough to support him as he desired to live if this was his usual dining place, mused the detective.

When they got outside the two turned toward Broadway again and Thad shadowed them.

Reaching Broadway they turned up-town and strutted along as though they had dined at Delmonico's.

"I wonder what sort of a lodging they will seek?" mused Thad, and he still kept them in sight.

They passed Madison Square and went on up as far as Twenty-sixth street, and then, to the detective's surprise, actually entered the Hoffman House!

Could it be possible that they roomed in this palatial house and took their meals in

such a den as he had just seen them emerge from?

But, while he was asking himself the question the men themselves answered it by taking the elevator to go up-stairs.

It was worse than a Chinese puzzle to the detective, but he was too much fatigued to investigate the matter any further that night, and returned to his lodgings and went to bed.

He was up early the next morning and along about the middle of the forenoon made himself up as a well-dressed young man about town. This done he called upon Merriman at the Hoffman. That is, he called there to see the young man.

Thad's idea in calling at that hour, which was considerably before the time for which the appointment called, was to ascertain whether he stopped at the Hoffman, and any other matters relating to the young man, which he could not get hold of while in his own proper person.

According to instructions Thad went to the clerk and inquired the number of Merriman's room.

"Merriman, Merriman?" mused the clerk. "There is nobody of that name stopping here." "Pardon me, I thought there was," said Thad, and turned to leave the place.

Just as he was about stepping out of the Broadway entrance somebody touched him on the sleeve, and, turning, who should he see standing before him but Templeton.

The detective almost shuddered at sight of this dead-beat, for his first impression was that Templeton knew him, but the man's first words reassured him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I was sure that you were Merriman's friend, Charlie Gay."

An idea flashed upon Thad; he would work a little scheme at the expense of this friend of Merriman's.

"Yes," he observed, "I am often mistaken for Charlie. Do you really think I resemble him very much?"

"Almost the exact image of him. The only difference is in the beard. Charlie wears an imperial and mustache, while you only wear a moustache."

Thad made a note of the fact.

"By the way, Merriman is not stopping here now, is he?"

Templeton laughed.

"Has he been telling you too that he stops here?"

"Yes."

"Well, between you and me he never did stop here. He tells everybody that he does—for a purpose."

"Don't like the accommodations, eh?"

"Accommodations, thunder! He don't like the price, or rather, he isn't equal to it."

"Where is he stopping?"

"He has a ramshackle garret over on Third avenue—223."

"Thank you." And Thad walked away.

The detective made his way toward Third avenue, and on the way stopped in at a saloon, the proprietor of which he was acquainted with, and added the imperial to his make-up. He happened to have the beard in his pocket, having put it there for any emergency that might demand a change.

The imperial donned, Thad continued on his way, and a few minutes later arrived at 223. If the exterior of the house was any index to the interior, Thad thought that Templeton's description must be about correct, for it was one of the most dilapidated, wretched looking places along the whole avenue.

A low, dirty beer saloon occupied the first floor, and in answer to his inquiry in there, he was informed that there was some kind of a duce in the last stages of poverty on the top floor.

Of course there was no elevator, and the detective was compelled to climb five flights of filthy-laden stairs to reach the top of the building, where he knocked on the first door he came to.

Somebody said "Come in," and, a moment later, the door opened and Merriman himself stood before him.

The young man was in his night-gown and had evilly just got out of bed.

He stared hard at the detective, and finally asked:

"Is this—no, it can't be—"

"Charlie Gay," interposed Thad.

"What I thought at first; but, deuce take it! how stout you've grown since I saw you last. Come in. This is a poor place to receive you, old fellow, but it's the best I can do just at present."

"I thought you had a room over at the Hoffman, old man," observed Thad, as he strolled into the room.

"So I have; but I don't dare to stop there at present."

"No? How's that?"

"Why, you see as long as I am where people know my address, the invitations to dine here and dine there pour in at such a rate that I can't keep a fourth of them, and you know how it is. If you go to one place and don't go to another the deuce is to pay. Besides a fellow must look out for his health. He will be a total wreck if he keeps all the engagements he is bound to make so dine out."

"So you have come over here to rest up, eh?" laughed the detective, as he glanced about him.

If that had been the fellow's object in coming there, he had certainly chosen a very queer place.

A single room with a low ceiling and lighted with a single small window, and scarcely enough furniture in the place for a bod-carrier's shanty.

"Yes. The place is plain and cozy," observed Merriman as he proceeded to dress himself.

"I'm surprised though, Gus," resumed the detective, "that a man of your means should stop in such a beastly hole as this."

Merriman turned and stared at him in surprise, and those wonderful eyes of his nearly unnerved Thad.

Then the lodger laughed slyly.

"How did you find out about it?" he asked, looking off in another direction.

Thad had not the remotest idea what he referred to, but he chanced upon an answer.

"Oh, I'm posted on all such matters," he rejoined with a light laugh.

"Well, allow me to inform you that it is extremely chimerical as yet. The girl's too sharp to give me an opportunity, and the two attempts we have made in the other way have been dead failures—the last one, made yesterday afternoon, resulting in the arrest of the chaps we had employed to do the job."

Here was a surprise for Thad. Up to that moment he had only given Merriman credit for being a blow-hard and liar, but never dreamed of his being the scoundrel he had just confessed to being.

But evincing no astonishment at what he had heard, the detective continued:

"Too deuced bad, don't ye know? How did it come about, old fellow?"

"All through a cursed detective who is working on the old man's case. He happened around while the fellows were there and managed by some sort of a trick to drug the lads and capture them, just as they were getting away with the whole business. I knew nothing of it till last night, when I met Asa, who told me about it. Philip had told me previously that the detective was there in the disguise of a priest, and also described how he looks in his natural character, so I laid for him and shadowed him to his room, and then watched to see if he would come out. He soon reappeared and I followed him to a *cafe* on Broadway and had a talk with him, and he engaged me to assist him on the job. Of course I told him I had plenty of money, and I thought I had at that moment, for I thought the robbery had been a success. What an ass I was! I might have touched the cove for a ten if I had known how things had panned out."

"Perhaps it isn't too late yet," suggested Thad.

"No, it is not too late. He will be round here this afternoon, or at least at the Hoffman, where I told him to meet me, and I'll pull his leg for a few bones."

"So I should. But, I must be going. Good-by, Gus!"

"Good-by, Charlie." And Thad departed.

CHAPTER XV.

NEW DIFFICULTIES ARISE.

THAD had learned enough in his interview with Merriman to satisfy him that there was a plot or had been a plot among several persons to rob old Stowe.

From the hints thrown out by this fellow Thad inferred that the conspiracy comprised himself and Templeton, probably the man called Philip—whoever he was—and, in all likelihood, more. He could not think that Ada had any part in it, although he was not so confident about her two friends, Mrs. Watson and Herbert Bailey. As likely as not, taking advantage of her eagerness to shield her foster-father from the detective and the old man's insane dread of detection, they were hatching a plot to secure possession of his wealth.

At all events, he determined to watch all parties carefully, and more especially Merriman and Templeton, who appeared to be the ring-leaders.

He would keep his engagement with Merriman and see what he could get out of him, and as it was now after eleven o'clock and the appointment was for two, he would not have any time to waste.

So, just stopping long enough to lunch, the detective repaired to his apartments and removed his disguise.

This done, and a couple of letters written, it was time to go.

When Thad reached the Hoffman House, much against his expectation, he met Merriman, who was on the lookout for him, at the Broadway entrance.

He grasped the detective's hand cordially, as he exclaimed:

"Old fellow, I'm glad to see you. I was afraid you had forgotten me. You're late, by Jove, you are!"

"No," responded Thad, consulting his watch, "I am exactly on time. It is now just two o'clock."

"Ah, then my stomach got ahead of my

watch." And here he put his hand upon his fob as though in the act of pulling out his watch. "There, by Jove!" he exclaimed, "I left my watch up-stairs on the dresser."

"That does not matter," rejoined the detective, who understood perfectly well that he had no watch. "We are going right up, are we not?"

"No, not just now. We will go get lunch first. That was why I met you down here instead of having you come up to the room. I got so deucedly hungry that I contemplated running round to Del's and getting a bite, but when I reached the street I remembered that I had invited you to lunch with me, and I would have sunk on the street from sheer hunger rather than disappoint a friend after inviting him, I would, by Jove! I'm deuced particular about these matters."

"Now that you mention it, I do remember that I was to lunch with you," remarked Thad. "But, like yourself, I had overlooked the fact and, as my usual hour of lunching is between twelve and one, I stopped in and had a luncheon."

"Unfortunate! Deuced unfortunate, don't you know! I was going to take you to my place—something a *little* ahead of the commonplace affair I saw you in last night. However, you can stand another cup of coffee, I dare say."

"Thank you, but I don't think I care to take even a cup of coffee just now; but that need not interfere with your lunching. I will wait here in the reading-room and smoke a cigar while you go in. You eat here, of course?"

"N—no. I go to a *cafe*. Can't stand the fare here. Its wretched! Better than your place down the street, of course, but far from the thing, don't you know?"

"It is all the same," replied Thad coolly. "I can wait here till you go to a *cafe* as well as for you to go into the dining-room of the hotel."

With that he walked into the reading-room and sat down, leaving his new acquaintance standing on the street.

Merriman twisted his mustache and looked after him wistfully for a moment, and then tipped in.

Thad saw him approaching but affected to be too much absorbed in his paper to notice him, and the adventurer stood irresolutely twisting his mustache nervously and gazing at the detective. Still the latter paid no attention to him, although it cost him an effort to preserve his gravity.

Merriman at length stepped timidly forward and plucked Thad by the sleeve.

Thad looked up in well-simulated surprise.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "You don't waste much time over your coffee and claret, my boy! Or have I been dreaming the time away over this paper? No," he went on, looking at his watch, "you have been gone less than ten minutes. By Jove! you would be a good traveler."

"The fact is," faltered Merriman, who had been trying all this time to get in a word, "the fact is, I haven't gone yet. I—I—"

"Oh, I see. Changed your mind, eh? Or were you detained by some one?"

"The fact is," stammered Merriman, putting on the boldest face he could under the circumstances, "I—I—"

"Ain't hungry, eh?" interrupted Thad.

"Well, so much the better. Never eat when you are not hungry and you will always have a good appetite."

"You don't comprehend me, sir," cried the other, growing desperate. "The fact is—er—I—that is, left my purse up-stairs, and rather than keep you waiting while I go up and get it, I was about to ask you for a—er—little change—say—er—a dollar, till we come back."

"Oh, certainly, two of them if you like. You cannot lunch off one dollar."

And the detective handed him the money!

"Thank you. Be right back. You are right. Two are better than one, especially at my place."

With that the crook strode out.

He had scarcely got outside the door, before Thad decided to see where he went, and slipping out of a side door, the detective kept his eyes on him for a few moments.

As Thad half expected, Merriman made off toward Third avenue and knowing that if he went to the same place he had seen him in the night before, he would not be back for some time, he concluded to see whether his man was making for the same place and, if so, he would return to his apartments and prepare for another expedition which he had in mind.

Keeping the game in sight across Madison Square, Thad saw him joined by his inseparable chum, Asa Templeton, and the two cronies made off in the direction of Third avenue.

The detective at once thought of abandoning the chase, but on second thought he changed his mind.

If this fellow was the villain he had made himself out to be, there was no telling what he and his pal might be up to, and following them might lead to some new revelation.

So he kept on.

Seeing that they took the course of the previous evening, Thad presumed they would go to the cheap John restaurant on Third avenue, and accordingly hit upon a plan of operation.

Stepping into the same saloon where he had changed his disguise the night before, he soon altered his whole appearance. First of all, he procured a suit of old clothes of one of the proprietor's assistants, and, after putting these on, he made his face up to resemble as tough a looking character as the East side ever produced. A shaggy, sunburned wig, a toper's nose and a discolored eye, added to a week's growth of dirty-looking beard and ragged neck-whiskers, were prominent features of his make-up. Then donning a dilapidated old slouch hat, he sallied forth.

Wending his way to the restaurant on Fourteenth street near Avenue A, he was gratified to see that his two worthies were seated at a table inside.

Slouching in, and seating himself at a table near them, Thad called for the prevalent dish of the section—"ham and," and although he had no appetite for the noxious dish as prepared in this filthy place, he pretended to eat and at the same time to be deeply absorbed in an ancient and greasy sporting paper which he found lying on the table, but in reality keeping his ears and eyes wide open for anything that might be said or done by the two men at the other table.

The latter did not converse much for the first few minutes, but, being apparently famished for food, applied themselves to the repast before them.

Finally, however, Templeton paused in the operation of lifting baked beans to his mouth to ask:

"Where did you make the raise, Gussie?"

"The sleuth I was telling you about. Thinks I'm going to help him on his case."

"How much did you bleed him for?"

"Two bones. Struck him for one and got two."

"Idiot!" growled Templeton. "Why didn't you strike him for five and get ten?"

"That's easy enough to talk, but another thing to work it. He's keener than I thought he was. Pretended to think that I had been to lunch, and kept talking so fast that I almost despaired of getting a chance to brace him at all. If you would do as well with your brother, we'd be all right."

"I always have till this thing commenced. He's so frightened now that no one but Ada can get within a mile of him. I went up there, as you know, yesterday afternoon, and could find nobody about. I met what I took to be a preacher, and had quite a talk with him, and as I came away—just before I met you—I met Ada and asked her what the dominie was doing there, and she laughed. She then informed me that he was a detective. She also told me about the robbery, and that this same detective had captured the robbers. By the way, I saw Charlie Gay looking for you this morning."

"Yes, he was up to the room. It broke my heart to have that fellow see how I was situated."

"Couldn't you brace him for anything?"

"Didn't try. Knew it was no use. He never has a cent. His father allows him a small stipend, which he spends on horses, and affects to be very tough. Do you know that the only way to stand in with Charlie is to pretend that you are a safe-blower or something of the kind? However, if I had met him at the Hoffman I should have braced him. He might have had a few cases about him. But in that rag-picker's den of mine no one would think of letting you have a cent."

"Well, about the detective. You told me last night that you had an engagement with him this afternoon."

"Yes, and I've fulfilled it."

"Aren't you going to see him any more?"

"Not if I can avoid it."

"Why don't you take the job he offered you?"

"What is the use? I could do nothing, and I would ruin my prospects with Ada, such as they are. If I could only raise a little dust in order to keep up appearances for awhile, I believe I could land her all right enough."

"I wish to gracious you could," groaned Templeton, "but I fear your chances are poor."

"Why?"

"She is so completely taken up with her mission work, as she calls it, that I don't believe she will ever marry anybody."

"That's encouraging. And yet I'm sure she thinks a good deal of me."

"I know she does. I heard her say that if she ever married anybody it would be you."

"Is that so?" eagerly.

"Sure."

"Then there is still hope."

"A little, maybe. And if you do make it, old fellow, you mustn't forget an old friend. You see, the old man will leave everything to her, and if she doesn't marry, she'll spend every dollar of it in charity and wouldn't give me the price of a meal."

"That is your own fault. You should have got on the good side of her when you had a chance."

"How did I know that she would ever gain such an influence over him? I thought I could influence my brother enough to get him to cast her off and make me his heir, but the more I tried the weaker became my influence, until

now she has it all her own way and I cannot even get an interview with him. If this detective can induce him to sign the documents, I will come in for a little on the other side; but I'm afraid that will never occur."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. The girl is determined that the detective shall never meet him, and now she has sent him away somewhere, nobody knows where—so that the detective will have no show."

"Has Ada gone too?"

"No, she has remained here and sent Philip with him."

CHAPTER XVI.

NOT SO MUCH OF A DISCOVERY.

AT this point the two worthies got up and left the restaurant.

Thad did not follow them immediately, as he did not care to shadow them.

But soon after they had gone he paid his bill and slouched out and was in time to see them sauntering off toward Broadway.

"Well," mused Thad, "I have gained a few points by this expedition, anyway. I have learned the very important fact that the old man has left the city and is no longer under the direct influence of that cunning little piece of femininity. If I can only get a clue to his whereabouts I will make short work of my case now. The puzzling point of these fellows' conversation is that they made so little mention of the robbery, and showed so little concern about the failure of it. Can it be, after all, that Merriman was alone in it, and that Templeton was innocent? That is what it looks like. Another thing I have learned is that the man Merriman is ambitious to marry Ada, and what is the strangest part of it is, that it seems that she is somewhat smitten with him; although I was pleased to learn that she was probably too sensible a girl to marry him."

"Well, he won't marry her if I can assert any influence over her, that is certain."

With his head full of these reflections, the detective made his way back to the saloon where he had made himself up and soon emerged therefrom in his own proper person.

He did not retain his proper person long, however, for he went directly from the saloon to his studio, and there disguised himself as an old woman.

It was by this time late in the afternoon, and by the time he reached the house on Fifteenth street, whither he repaired, it was approaching darkness.

Thad trudged up the four flights of stairs, having found the door open, and knocked at the door of Mrs. Watson's flat.

The door was promptly opened by that lady herself, who eyed the detective curiously.

"Is Miss Stowe in?" he inquired in a feminine voice.

"She is not," was the prompt response.

"I presume she has gone home then?" continued Thad.

"Yes, I think she has. It is funny that you did not meet her, as she went down not more than two minutes ago."

"I did not, however, and I am sorry to have bothered you. Good-evening."

"Don't mention it," rejoined the old lady politely, and as she appeared inclined to talk, the detective did not hurry away, thinking that there might be something gained by a little gossip.

"I am sorry I did not meet her, as it would have saved me a long trip," supplemented Thad.

"Oh, it is not a very long trip when you once get on the cars. Was there anything particular about which you wished to speak to her, or something that I might enlighten you on?"

"I'm afraid you could not do me any good. The fact is I wanted—I have understood that Miss Stowe takes great interest in procuring respectable situations for young girls, and I have one whom I would like to get a place for."

"You had better see Ada herself about that. She will be only too glad to do what she can for you in that line, and I have no doubt that she can procure a place for your daughter."

"Thank you very much. I should not have thought of coming to her only that I used to know Ada's father."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. We were good friends more than twenty years ago, when I was well-to-do. Ah, how times have changed since then!" sighed the alleged old woman.

Mrs. Watson eyed him suspiciously.

If he had known Stowe for more than twenty years, she evidently thought, he would not have now known him as Stowe.

"Are you sure that you have known Ada's father as long as that?" she asked incredulously.

"Sure! I am as sure as that I am standing here! Twenty, did I say? It is more than thirty."

The old lady looked more suspicious than ever.

She evidently thought that she had run down a first-class fraud who was trying to work the old acquaintance racket to get some money out of Ada.

"Where did you know Mr. Stowe twenty or thirty years ago, my good woman?" she inquired.

"I did not know Mr. Stowe thirty years ago," answered the detective promptly. "But I did know Harvey Templeton thirty odd years ago in Lychfield, Kent, England."

The old woman colored and became greatly agitated.

She was silent for some moments, and it seemed two or three times as though she was on the point of shutting the door in Thad's face without making any response to his last remark.

But apparently her curiosity got the upper hand, and she finally said:

"If you knew him as Templeton how did you know that his name was Stowe, or rather that he was called Stowe in this country?"

"Oh, as to that, I met him here—met him several times. The first time about ten years ago. I met him twice the same day. The first time I was not quite sure that I knew him. I looked at him and he at me, and we passed on. I kept thinking about it and wondering where I had met him, and pretty soon I met him again. Then I nodded and smiled and he smiled and came up to me and put out his hand. 'Where have I seen you?' says he. 'Not in Boston?' 'No, not in Boston,' said I, 'but in Lychfield, Kent,' said I. 'Great Heaven!' he exclaimed. 'Then it is Miss Cobden!' 'Miss Cobden that was,' says I; 'but Mrs. Hawkins that is.' Well, ma'am, he turned all kinds of colors, and asked me if I had heard of his misfortune. I told him I had, and, he asked me if I wanted to ruin him or for old acquaintance's sake let bygones be bygones. I told him that if he was repentant he had probably been forgiven by the only One that had a right to forgive, and that it was not my purpose to make anybody unhappy that was trying to reclaim his life and be a good man. He thanked me and shook me by the hand warmly, and asked me to call on him, and that if I was ever in trouble to ask him. He then told me that his name over here was Stowe."

"I have been fortunate enough to need no assistance and have asked no one for any, and never shall for myself, although Hawkins did die and leave me without a penny and five small children. The oldest one, a girl, is now fifteen, and I have got to get her a job at something to help along, as the burden is getting too much for me all alone."

This story, which Thad rattled off as though he had rehearsed it for the occasion, melted the old woman's heart. And, better still, convinced her that 'Mrs. Hawkins' was all she represented herself as being.

"I am very sorry for you, Mrs. Hawkins," said the old woman, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, "and I am sure that Ada will not only do her best to get your daughter a place but assist you, if you need it."

"Oh, thank you, and God bless you and her!" cried Thad in a husky voice. "I ask nothing for myself, except it be work. If either of you has any sewing—plain sewing to do, I shall be very thankful."

"I will see. Come in to-morrow and perhaps we can find something for you."

"Thank you. Oh, there was one more thing I wanted to ask you. I haven't seen Mr. Templeton for some time—a year, it must be. How is he? I heard that he was poorly of late years."

"His health is not as good as it might be, I believe," rejoined the old woman rather dryly, Thad thought.

"Will he be at the house, do you think? I should so much like to see him."

"No, he is not there at present."

"Ah, I'm so sorry. Gone out of the city, perhaps?"

"Yes, I believe he has."

"To the sea-shore, maybe?"

"Likely."

No go, thought Thad. He would have to depend upon some other source for his information. Still, he would make one more trial.

"I hope he has gone to a good place," he murmured. "There is all the difference in the world in beaches, when one's health is to be considered. Some are too dry and some are too damp, some too windy and others are not windy enough. I hope he has got one that will suit his constitution."

"I hope so," responded the old woman, who was aggravatingly non-committal.

Thad was almost afraid to venture any nearer the point, but he thought of the old adage of "nothing risked, nothing gained," and observed in a half musing whine, peculiar to old women when particularly anxious to worm a secret out of any one:

"Of course you don't know what place he went to? It is nothing to me, only I'm so anxious about the poor gentleman's health."

To his surprise and delight she answered:

"Well, no, I am not quite clear as to that, but I think he went either to Narragansett Pier or Newport. He has cottages at both places and sometimes goes to one place and sometimes to the other, as the fit takes him. Of course I have not seen him lately myself. I only know through Ada."

"Well, either of those places is healthy, I believe, although a poor woman like me has very little chance of seeing the sea anywhere except at Coney Island once in a while. But I must go. I'm ever so much obliged to you for your information, and also for your offer of work. I shall call to-morrow and see what you have. Good-night."

"Don't mention it. Good-night."

As the old woman closed the door and the detective turned to go, he caught a glimpse of a curly head, which had been thrust out of a door on the opposite side of the hall, disappearing.

He could not make out whether it was the head of a girl or boy, but whoever it was had evidently been listening to the conversation between Thad and the old woman.

Thad thought nothing about it, and descended the stairs.

He was in a state of mind bordering on ecstasy at the successful result of his visit.

If the old man was at either of the watering-places it would be easy to find him, and it would be equally easy to discover which one he was at, or whether he was at either.

As first he did not consider it worth while to call upon Ada at all, as he had all the information he desired, and, indeed, he did not consider that he could spare the time. He would therefore go directly to his rooms, change his disguise and take the train that night for Newport, so as to be there in the morning. And if he did not find his man there, it was only twenty miles to Narragansett Pier.

Thad walked at a rapid pace and soon reached the door leading up into his apartments and was about to ascend the stoop when he heard some one call to him, and turning about, saw the curly head standing near him and looking eagerly up into his face.

The owner of the curly head was a little girl about ten years old, with very bright eyes and an intelligent face.

"Missus!" called the little girl.

"Well?" was Thad's demand in a gentle voice.

"Please'm, ain't you the same lady that was a-talkin' to Miss Watson?" asked the child breathlessly.

"Yés, sissy. Why?"

"'Cause, what she tole ye wasn't true."

Thad opened his eyes.

It had never occurred to him that the apparently honest old woman would deceive him, and yet he remembered that she was abetting Ada in her attempt to outwit him.

"What do you mean, child?" he asked eagerly.

"Why, she tole ye that the young lady wasn't in, an' she is. I seen her jest before you come."

"Mrs. Watson said that she had just gone a minute before."

"But she didn't go."

"How do you know?"

"I seen her after you left. She come to the door as you was a-goin' down-stairs an' made a face at ye."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Yés'm."

"All right. It was very nice of you to come and tell me, and here is a nickel for you," said the detective, handing her the coin. "Run on back now."

"Please'm, there was something else she tole ye that wasn't true, too."

"What was that?"

"She said the old man was gone away. He ain't, he's there in the flat. I seen him this afternoon."

And the curly head darted away.

CHAPTER XVII.

AS A FORTUNE-TELLER.

THAD was in a quandary.

He did not know whether to believe the child or the old lady.

It was difficult for him to believe that the old lady, apparently so honest and simple-minded, could be guilty of such a bare-faced falsehood, and it was equally hard to believe that the child would be capable of inventing the story.

There was a bare possibility that she had been coached by an older person, but what could be the motive of any one for doing such a thing?

His irresolution was short-lived, however.

"There is but one way of deciding the matter," he mused, "and that is to go to the Fifty-seventh street house and ascertain whether Ada is there or not. If she is, one portion of the story at least is settled. And as for the whereabouts of the old man, that will have to be settled hereafter."

Having arrived at this conclusion he ascended to his studio and made some alteration in his disguise.

He still retained the character of a woman, but made himself up as an older and more respectable female, and so radical was the change that any one seeing him in the one would never recognize him in the other.

He then walked over to Ninth avenue, and boarded an up-town Elevated car, and fifteen minutes later alighted at Fifty-ninth street, from which a short walk brought him to the Stowe residence.

In answer to his ring the usual servant came to the door, and Thad asked him whether Miss

Stowe was in or not, to which the attendant answered in the affirmative.

Taking a card from his pocket on which was engraved

MDME. STELLA BREVOURT,

CLAIRVOYANT,

and handing it to the servant, the detective said:

"Give that to the young lady, if you please."

The footman bowed and retired.

A few minutes later he returned and asked the detective to step into the parlor, and said that Miss Ada would be down in a few minutes.

Thad waited in the drawing-room, which had become pretty familiar to him by this time, for several minutes.

At length he heard a soft footstep and the young lady entered.

Her brow was slightly clouded and she looked as though she were not particularly pleased at the visit, especially as it was now after nine o'clock, rather a late hour for a visitor.

"To what am I indebted for this visit, madame?" she asked rather sharply, advancing at once to the detective as though she wanted the interview over as soon as possible.

"I hope the young lady will not lose her patience until I explain the nature of my business with her," began Thad in a feminine voice so perfect that nobody could have detected him.

"Very well, proceed," retorted the young lady impatiently, sinking mechanically into a seat.

"I do not know whether you believe in astrology or not, young lady," pursued the detective. "But—"

"I may as well satisfy your mind on that point at once, madame," interposed Ada, "by telling you that I do not. I have no faith in any such nonsense. So if that is your mission, you are wasting your time in talking to me."

"I beg that you will not be hasty, young lady," implored Thad in such a persuasive tone that she could not choose but listen. "It makes no difference whether you believe in this oldest and most respectable of sciences. If I tell you facts which you know no mortal could have known, you must accept them. Am I not right?"

Ada nodded her head impatiently.

"Very well. If I can tell what has already occurred, what is to hinder me—not me, but the stars, which I have the power of reading—from telling what is to come?"

Ada did not reply, and patted her foot nervously.

"I may as well tell you, to start with, that I read that you are in great trouble at this moment. You are threatened from at least three sources. At least you are threatened from two and imagine you are from another. The one source from which you expect trouble is the one from which you have the least cause to fear. From that source will come relief and assistance. It is from the other two, from which you expect no trouble, that your greatest annoyance will come if not warned in time."

"What is all this palaver about, anyway?" asked Ada impatiently. "It is all Greek to me."

"I will explain," continued the detective. "Your father is threatened with exposure for something he has done—at least that is what you suppose. As a fact you have nothing to fear from that source. The person who you are afraid will expose him has no such intention. His only purpose is for your good and that of your father. But there are two sources from which you may expect trouble and serious trouble, if you are not warned in time."

Ada smiled, and her face assumed an expression of mingled amusement and contempt, but she could not conceal from the detective that she was becoming interested.

"What are these sources?" she asked in a sarcastic tone. "But first let me ask you what your charges are for all this wonderful information."

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Not one single cent. You are a young lady whose life is being devoted to the good of your fellow-man, and I propose to show you, if you will allow me, that I too can do some good to my fellow-man. I have plenty of this world's goods and require nothing from you or anybody else."

"You are very kind." Still sarcastically.

"It is no kindness to do your duty, my dear young lady. It is a privilege. You, and not the recipient of your bounty, are rendered happy by your action."

"That is my doctrine," she said, coloring a little.

"I am glad that we agree on one point. But to answer your question. The source of your greatest danger is from a young man who aspires to your hand."

Ada blushed and opened her eyes, but strove to conceal her confusion.

"Who is he?" she asked lightly.

"His name is Augustus Merriman. He has represented to you that he is a young man of property and respectability. He tells you that he boards at a first-class hotel in the city, while as a matter of fact he lives upon the meager

bounty of others, such trifling items as he can beg or borrow from chance acquaintances, and lodges in the meanest and cheapest of furnished apartments obtainable."

Ada had grown greatly excited during this recital.

"How do you know this, madame?" she demanded excitedly.

"From the stars."

She calmed herself with an effort.

"Go on."

"His only motive is to marry you and get possession of your wealth. That is the wealth which your father—or foster-father—"

"What do you mean?" she interrupted.

"That the man who claims to be your father is nothing of the kind, although he has always been everything that a father could be to you, and intends to leave you his fortune."

Ada groaned but made no reply.

"This young rascal," pursued Thad, "is, as I have said, scheming to get possession of your fortune. He is seconded in his effort by a brother of your father—I shall call him your father—who is as void of principle as himself. If he can get your fortune without marrying you, he will not trouble himself about you. He it was that planned the robbery of your house a day or two ago, and only for the timely interference of the man whom you dread, and who is a detective, they would have succeeded."

Thad was silent a moment and watched the effect of his words upon the young lady.

He was gratified to see that he had impressed her deeply.

He was also delighted to know that for once she had failed to penetrate his disguise.

"As you are so well-acquainted with our affairs," she said at last, in an almost inaudible voice, "perhaps you can tell me who it was that induced my father to draw all his money out of the bank on the very day of the attempted robbery."

This was a poser for the pretended fortune-teller.

He had never heard that the old gentleman had done anything of the kind, and it was a difficult question for him to answer; but it would never do to acknowledge that he did not know, and he must trump up some sort of an answer.

After pretending to consult some unseen oracle, while as a matter of fact he was cudgeling his brain to conjecture who would be likely to have sufficient influence with the old man to induce him to draw his money out of the bank, he was favored with a happy thought.

Thad was confident that neither Merriman nor Templeton could have had any hand in it for two reasons. First, if Merriman had been the one he would have boasted of it; and second, Templeton had asserted that he had not been able to get near his brother for several weeks, so it could not have been either of them.

The only person, then, as far as Thad could understand, who could wield any influence over the old gentleman was the man whom he had met on his first visit, and who had impersonated Stowe. Thad did not know his name, but judged from several things that had occurred that he was the person referred to as Philip.

He, then, must be the man, although the detective did not feel warranted in alluding to him by name, because he might be in error, besides he knew no other name for him than simple Philip.

He therefore hit upon the bold yet safe subterfuge of describing him vaguely.

"Consulting the stars more closely, Miss Stowe," he resumed at length, "I find that the two persons referred to as having conspired in the robbery—"

"Two persons?" exclaimed Ada in surprise. "I thought you said that Merriman had planned that affair alone."

Thad saw that he was caught, but he was cunning enough to worm out of his difficulty.

"I did not say alone," he said in a calm voice. "I said, if you remember, that he it was—alluding to Merriman, of course—that planned the robbery. I should have said that he was the ringleader, but was assisted by another. This other was your father's brother. In addition to them, I now find, there was another, who is a member of your household, it seems. He is an oldish man—the stars tell me—at least he has gray hair, and has great influence over your father."

"Philip—" gasped Ada, but did not finish the name.

"He it was—so the stars tell me," supplemented the detective, pretending not to have noticed the interruption, "that influenced your father to withdraw his money from the bank on the day of the robbery."

"Just what I—" But she checked herself and became silent.

After awhile she resumed:

"What is the other source from which I may expect trouble?"

Her sarcasm had all vanished now.

There was not a shadow of a doubt that she believed as firmly in astrology as any star-worshiper of olden times.

"Well, I have given you both in one, miss," Thad rejoined. "Merriman and Asa Templeton."

My manner of recital blended the two. But, as I have shown, after consulting the stars more closely, I find three sources besides the chimerical one which I told you you had no reason to fear—Merriman, Templeton and the man called Philip."

It now occurred to the detective that he had her sufficiently impressed to permit him to venture a question on a point which he was very anxious to have decided.

The whereabouts of her foster-father.

He knew he should have to approach the subject cautiously and use a good deal of diplomacy.

"I also see, Miss Stowe," he resumed, "that your solicitation for your father's welfare, or in other words to keep him out of the reach of this dreaded detective, you have sent him away in charge of this man Philip. He is at present, if the stars tell the truth, at one of the two watering-places, Newport or Narragansett Pier."

Ada opened her eyes very wide and stared at the detective as though she imagined him some supernatural being.

Her confusion told him plainly that he had hit the mark, but she evidently did not care to admit it, for the next instant she broke out in a wild laugh and said:

"There your horoscope is at fault. I have done nothing of the kind."

"I wish I could believe you. However, let me advise you to get away from Philip as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BIT BY BIT THE PLOT UNFOLDS.

ADA was extremely nervous over the latest revelations of the so-called fortune-teller.

Although no more remarkable than any of the other unaccountable—to her—things he told, this appeared to affect her more.

This was evidently a secret which she deemed too profound for even a clairvoyant to fathom.

Perhaps she feared that the fortune-teller, who had spoken favorably of the detective, might by some chance make his acquaintance and reveal her secret to him, from whom of all others she desired to keep it inviolate.

In the mean time she kept her eyes fixed upon Thad's face, and appeared to be studying it minutely.

Then suddenly her nervousness seemed to vanish.

The old look of cunning and mischief reasserted itself in her face, and to the detective's surprise, she rose quickly to her feet and burst out laughing.

"I have it!" she cried. "You deceived me this time, Mr. Burr; but you made the mistake of going a little too far. You are a good one, though. I never saw such acting in the whole course of my life."

Thad could not restrain himself either, and joined in her merriment.

"What do you think of astrology now, Miss Stowe?" he laughed.

"It is a wonderful art, I must admit."

"You cannot deny that I told you a good many facts."

"No, I cannot deny that. And the wonder to me is, where you got possession of them."

"That is my secret."

"But about this Merriman. Where did you meet him?"

"The impudent rascal had the effrontery to shadow me the night I left here. Followed me to my lodgings, and then from there to a cafe where I took my dinner."

"And do you think he is the rascal you make him out to be?"

"Do I think? I know it. He told me, as I have no doubt that he did you, that he stopped at the Hoffman House, and I found that he occupied the most wretched quarters on Third avenue, almost destitute of furniture, and entirely devoid of comfort. He had invited me to lunch with him, and when it came to the pinch he had no money. I lent him enough to get his own meal, and when I followed him, I found him eating in a filthy dive on the East side, in company with this man Templeton, in a place that I am surprised that any decent person could stomach the food."

"Poor fellow! And he appears to have such refined tastes. What do you think of his eyes?"

"He has the eyes of a basilisk. They give me a shiver."

"So they did me at first; but when you get used to them you will be fascinated with them."

Thad laughed.

"I have no doubt that you were, Miss Stowe," he rejoined.

The girl blushed deeply.

"I admit that I rather admired Augustus; but if what you say of him be true, of course I shall have nothing more to do with him. How do you know that he had anything to do with the robbery?"

"He told me so with his own lips. Boasted of it."

"His indiscretion transcends his impudence. Did he not know that you, being a detective, were likely to arrest him?"

"He did not know to whom he was speaking at the time."

"I see. He unbosomed himself to you something as I have done, while you were masquer-

ading under some of your numerous characters, eh? What were you, a priest or an old woman at the time?" she laughed.

"Neither. I was a young dude—one of his intimate friends."

"And he did not recognize that you were not his friend?"

"Certainly not."

Ada was disgusted.

She had only evinced pity when told of his vagabondism, and the least bit of distrust when she learned of his rascality; but when she discovered that he was wanting in tact and cunning, her contempt for him had no bounds.

"A fig for his eyes and his brain tool!" she cried with a scornful curl of the lip. "I knew he was flippant and wanted stability; but I had no idea that he was an idiot!"

"He is no idiot, Miss Stowe. But he lacks discretion and honesty. He is not as bad, in my opinion, as he would like to appear. His ambition is to be a thug, but he is unequal to the role for want of cunning and courage. He will improve in time, if his career is not cut short."

"Why do you not have him arrested for complicity in the attempted robbery?"

"I prefer to leave him at large and watch him. He will betray some criminal worth the taking if let alone. That is his weak point—he cannot hold his tongue."

"Well, enough of him," she cried impatiently, throwing herself wearily down upon a lounge.

"Tell me, what led you to believe—for I dare say it is only conjecture—that our Philip is mixed up in the affair?"

Thad was again put to his wits' ends for a reply.

She had struck the truth when she asserted that it was conjecture on his part, but it would not do to admit it, so his only alternative was bluff.

"It is hard for me to deny you anything, Miss Stowe," he said in a kindly tone; but there are truths which the detective sometimes has to keep from his best friends. This is one of them. I make the assertion that what I told you is true. Use your own brain—you are something of a detective yourself—and ascertain whether it be not true."

"Very well," she answered discontentedly. "I will take your advice. I never liked the man, between you and me, but papa thinks he is all in all."

"What is his other name, Miss Stowe?"

This question appeared to strike her like an electric shock.

She started nervously and stared at the detective as though he had touched an open wound.

"His name?" she mused half dreamily. And then suddenly bringing herself with a short check, answered simply: "Why—er—Jones."

"I see," said Thad in an incredulous tone. "I did not know but it might be Thornburg."

If the simple asking what his name was had caused her agitation, this suggestion of it produced a panic in the girl.

She sprang to her feet and glared at the detective as though she were about to fly at him tooth and nail.

"What makes you think that that is his name?" she gasped.

But before he had time to reply, she had regained her self-possession, and with a half hysterical little laugh, sunk down upon the lounge again.

And then with a saucy smile and a careless toss of her pretty head she observed in a commonplace manner:

"Funny that you should have imagined that his name was that, Mr. Burr."

"It is strange," he replied coolly, "but one will get queer notions into one's head. And now, Miss Stowe, there is one more question I would like to ask you before I go."

"What is that?" she asked quickly and nervously. She had evidently got to dread his questions.

"You were at the house of Mrs. Watson this evening, were you not?"

She looked a little puzzled to understand how he should have known, but finally answered quietly:

"Yes."

"May I ask what time you left there?"

"I do not know exactly."

"Was it before dark or after?"

"Before, I am quite sure."

"You will remember this, at least. Did anybody call and inquire for you while you were there?"

"I do not know but they did. Why?"

"To be more explicit. Did an old woman, who had a daughter for whom she desired you to obtain a situation, call there?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Mrs. Watson mentioned nothing of such an occurrence, did she?"

"No, sir."

"At all events, you did not know of the woman being there, and come to the door and look after her as she descended the stairs, did you?"

"Certainly not. Why, what strange questions you do ask, Mr. Burr. I saw no one except—"

"Never mind," he interrupted. "It was not the old woman?"

"No. Who was the old woman?"

"Mrs. Hawkins, I believe her name is. Do you know any of the neighbors in the building there?"

"Not one. Oh, yes, there is Mrs. Filkins across the hall. I called upon her when she was ill and gave her a little assistance."

"Has she a child—a daughter about ten or eleven years old, a curly-haired little whiffet?"

"I believe she has."

"What are the relations between Mrs. Filkins and Mrs. Watson?"

"I do not know. I never heard one speak of the other in any way."

"They have never quarreled far as you know?"

"Never."

"Was there any other young lady at Mrs. Watkins's when you were there?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I may as well tell you. After the old woman—Mrs. Hawkins—left, the curly-haired little girl I have spoken of followed her and told her that you had been there when she (the old woman) called, notwithstanding the fact that Mrs. Watson had said that you were not. Can you assign any motive for this?"

"None whatever. I will investigate the matter."

"Thank you. And let me know the result?"

"If you desire to know it."

"I do. And now I will leave you, Miss Stowe. I have enjoyed this visit exceedingly. Good-evening."

And the detective arose to go.

But at that moment an idea occurred to him that a very important point had been overlooked.

Turning to Ada again, he said:

"If you remember, Miss Stowe, on my first visit here I had an interview with the man whom you call Philip Jones?"

She smiled at the mention of Philip Jones.

"Yes," she admitted.

"At that time he pretended to be your father."

She laughed, but made no answer.

"I should like to see him again, if it is convenient, Miss Stowe. Is he in?"

Again she laughed.

"You will have to—" She checked herself and became silent a moment, and then continued in a calm, matter-of-fact tone:

"No, sir, he is not at home this evening, I believe."

"Thank you. That is all. I will leave you now. Once more good-night."

He extended his hand which she grasped cordially, and laughingly responded:

"Good-night, Madame Brevourt, *alias* Mrs. Hawkins, *alias* Mr. Burr, *alias* everything else under the sun."

As Thad made his way back to his lodgings he reflected upon the significance of the late interview.

He had learned several important facts, and had intimations of several more.

He entertained little doubt now that what Mrs. Watson had told him regarding Stowe was true, and he determined to go first to one place and then the other at once.

Everything appeared to be clearing satisfactorily, and he felt that his progress in the case was as good as he could wish.

There was still one great mystery that required to be cleared up, and he felt that upon it depended in a great measure the ultimate success of his case, and that was the mystery hanging about this man they called Philip.

Why was it that everybody appeared to wish to conceal his surname?

This, coupled with the impression the detective had first formed of the man, led him to believe that there was something hidden and dark about the fellow's history.

He certainly had the appearance of a criminal, and his actions stamped him as a loafer.

With these reflections Thad returned to his studio, removed his feminine make-up and substituted one of a prosperous business man, and an hour later took the train for Newport.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HAUNTING VISION.

IT is an old adage that he who devotes himself solely to the welfare of his brother often neglects himself.

This was true of Thad in the present case.

Had he been thinking of himself more and of others less, he would have seen the skulking form that followed him from his lodgings to the depot and boarded the same train with him.

For a long time after taking his seat in the car the detective's mind was so much absorbed between the evening paper which he had bought before getting aboard and his own thoughts, that he paid no attention to any one about him.

Later, however, he threw aside his paper and his reflections for a moment or two to engage in his favorite pastime of scanning faces.

This habit, always delightful to him, had grown to be second nature through his profession.

As his eye passed along from one face to another, and he made a mental note of the probable character of this person and that, it fell upon a face that interested him more than the rest.

The owner sat in the next seat but one from him, and sat facing the detective.

When he first caught a glimpse of the person's face, he—it was a man—had evidently been staring at him a long time, for he was then gazing intently at him, and to all appearances, studying every lineament of Thad's face; but when he saw that the latter was looking at him, the fellow dropped his eyes and grew confused.

There was nothing in the face itself to remind the detective of anything he had ever seen before, but the eyes were familiar. He had undoubtedly seen those eyes before, but where, he could not for the life of him recall at the moment.

And the strangest part of it was, that the moment he fixed his own eyes on them, the detective seemed fascinated.

He could not, try as he would, keep his eyes away from that face, and when he would, by sheer force, occasionally look in another direction and again return to the object of his infatuation, he invariably found the eyes fixed upon him, and as quickly averted as soon as the owner found that he had been discovered.

For a long time Thad was so absorbed in the eyes that he took no note of the character of the rest of the face, but after awhile it occurred to him that studying the man's character might serve to draw his mind away from the eyes.

He then noticed, and he was surprised at the discovery, that the man appeared to be well advanced in years; that he had a gray beard and his face was seamed with wrinkles.

Why had he not noticed this before?

And the strangest thing about it was that the instant his eyes turned to those of the stranger again he could only think of him as a young man.

There was certainly something youthful, even boyish and flippant about his eyes.

As the detective reflected upon the subject his mind naturally reverted to his first meeting with Merriman in the *café*, and of the strange effect the young man's eyes had had upon him. And then he tried to associate these eyes with those of Merriman. But no, there was all the difference in the world. He remembered that Merriman's eyes were remarkably black and sinister in expression. These, on the contrary, were steel-gray and rather pleasant and winsome in expression. And yet they exercised the same mysterious influence over the detective that the young man's had.

This caused him to wonder all the more at the coincidence of seeing two pairs of eyes, which possessed such magic power all within the same week.

So unnerved did Thad become over the matter at length that he determined to make the man's acquaintance and see if that would not have the effect of dispelling the charm.

He remembered that Merriman's eyes had no more effect on him than anybody else's after he made the fellow's acquaintance.

The thing would not be difficult, as the owner of the eyes appeared to be a plain working-man, and the seat beside him was vacant. So he would have but to introduce himself and, under the plea of lonesomeness, take the unoccupied seat and enter into conversation with the man.

Thad arose to carry out his plan, but the moment he did so, the other man, as though he had divined Thad's motive, also arose and made off toward the other end of the car.

Thad was a little astonished at the strange conduct of the stranger at first, but as the latter sauntered off slowly and deliberately, he concluded that he had gone for a drink of water or something of the kind, so he resumed his seat and decided to wait for the fellow's return.

But he did not return.

Thad glanced along the row of seats extending to the end of the car, thinking that he might have seated himself in one of them, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"This is very strange," mused the detective. "The fellow must be a criminal of some kind and suspecting that I was a detective, imagined that I was after him. Just for curiosity I will follow him up and give him a little scare, anyway."

With that Thad went into the next car and examined every face in there; but his man was not there.

He then went into the next and went through the same operation, and with the same result.

The next car was visited and the next, and so on through the entire train, but to no purpose. No one resembling his man was to be seen anywhere.

Thad felt uneasy.

How could the fellow have got off? The train had not stopped since the man had left his seat, and it was traveling too fast—almost a

mile a minute—for a man to jump off while it was in motion.

A horrible suspicion seized the detective.

He remembered now that there was a certain wildness about the expression of the eyes.

Perhaps the man was a lunatic, and his attention to him had frightened him into jumping from the train and thus destroying himself.

The shock could hardly have been greater if the detective had actually witnessed the deed.

He grew nervous and he felt the cold perspiration starting from his forehead.

At length the conductor came through and Thad asked him if he remembered a man suiting the description.

The conductor did remember him, but had no idea what had become of him.

Did he think the man had jumped off the moving train? Possibly. But what of it? If he wanted to get out of the world in that way, he, the conductor, could not see that it particularly interested anybody else. It certainly did not him. And the conductor walked placidly on, softly whistling a popular air, and smiling as sweetly as though he had just witnessed a pantomime.

But it was otherwise with Thad.

He was restless and nervous, and never ceased to think of the imaginary horrible spectacle of a man jumping from a flying train and being hurled into atoms by the rocky roadside.

At length the train rolled into the station at Newport, and the bustle and burly-burly had the effect of partially dissipating the uncanny vision.

Thad was pushing his way through the crowd in order to reach an omnibus to go to the hotel, when he felt some one tug at his sleeve and, turning suddenly about, he caught a glimpse of a man just vanishing in the crowd whose actions showed him to be the offender.

Thad supposed that it was some mischievous wag who had done this for the purpose of irritating him, as he did not recognize the man by a view of his back, but just as the fellow was disappearing he turned and looked back.

It was the man with the eyes!

This did give the detective a start.

For the first time in his life he experienced a feeling resembling that which a very superstitious person might experience.

He hurried away and after a time managed to quiet his nerves by reflecting that possibly after all he might have overlooked the fellow in the train, and his materialism coming to his aid, he managed to gradually drive the phantom away and laugh at his foolish fancy.

It was long after midnight when he reached the hotel, and, being greatly fatigued, he went to his room and retired at once.

But it was a long time before he could compose himself to sleep.

His mind was too busy with the strange events of the day, and with plans for the morrow, to permit of sleep.

Finally exhausted nature asserted itself, however, and he lost sight of the tangible world for a while.

When he awoke it was broad daylight and, remembering the amount of work he had laid out to be done on that day, the detective sprang out of bed and soon dressed and made his toilet.

Just as he was about leaving his room, and had unlocked his door, and then turned back for something, the door suddenly opened and a head was thrust in.

A glance sufficed to show him that it was that of a woman, but supposing it to be the chambermaid, he thought little about the occurrence more than that she was a rather impudent one to have opened his door without knocking.

Up to that moment—and only a few seconds had elapsed altogether since the head was thrust in—he had given it but a passing glance; but as it appeared in no hurry to withdraw itself again, Thad looked a second time.

He now saw that the owner of the head was staring at him, and—horrors! The same eyes that had disturbed him on the train were staring at him!

For an instant he was transfixed with a kind of terror entirely new to him, but it was extremely transitory.

A second later his manhood asserted itself, and he was thrown into a rage.

Pushing up his sleeves, the detective made a dash at the door.

But before he reached it the head disappeared and the door closed.

Thad did not pause on this account, however, but dashing open the door he sprang through.

When he reached the hall he was as much astonished as he had been at sight of the head.

No one was there!

Where could the woman—or man, as he supposed it to be—have gone so quickly?

He glanced up and down the corridor, but not only was there no one in sight, but every door along the corridor was closed and no sign of any one moving anywhere.

Thad was mystified and dumfounded, but there was nothing to be done but swallow his wrath and leave it to time to solve the mystery.

He descended to the dining-room and called

for breakfast, mentioning his strange adventure to no one, but he kept a sharp eye upon all who came and went.

However, the meal was finished without any one appearing that suited the description of his tormentor.

As soon as he had finished his breakfast Thad examined the register for the name of Stowe, but it was not there.

He then made inquiries for the cottage of the old man.

He was not long in locating it, and made his way thither.

As he approached the cottage he was delighted to see that it was occupied.

He rung the bell and inquired of the servant who attended the door whether Mr. Stowe was at the cottage this season.

"Yes," was the reply. "He arrived only yesterday; but he is out just at present."

"Is he in the surf?" asked Thad.

"No, sir, I think not. He does not bathe in the forenoon. But he usually walks in the morning. You may find him somewhere along the beach."

Thad waited for no more questions, but hurried away.

It did not occur to him that the old man would not be likely to be alone, his only thought was of finding him by the beach, far away from the baleful influence of either Ada or Philip.

He was so full of enthusiasm that he scarcely knew what he was doing, and walked so rapidly that when he reached the beach he was in a high state of perspiration.

There were a good many in bathing, and more strolling along the strand, some of them in bathing suits and some in ordinary dress, but the detective saw nothing but faces. These he saw and scanned so closely that some of the people were inclined to be offended, especially the ladies; but he noticed nothing. He was looking for the face of an old man with white beard and a scared look.

Finally he saw something that increased his excitement ten-fold. It was old man Stowe—and alone!

CHAPTER XX.

ALMOST A VICTORY.

HAD Thad been less enthusiastic he might have exercised more discretion and tact.

It was a new thing for Thad Burr to lose his head; but on this occasion he certainly did.

So eager was he to get at the old man that, instead of walking along quietly and accidentally encountering him as he usually did such things, he rushed up heedlessly and before the old man realized that any one was near him, Thad had addressed him by name.

The old man stopped and stared at him, and his face assumed the frightened expression that he had noticed on first meeting him in the little room behind the parlor.

"Who are you?" he demanded in a quaking voice. "I do not know you, sir!"

Thad saw his mistake when it was too late, and sought to make amends by his usual tact.

"Oh," he rejoined laughingly, "I have met you in the city often. My name is Platt. I am in business on Broadway, and have come down for a few days' recreation. Delightful morning, Mr. Stowe."

But this did not serve to quiet the old man's nerves.

He stared at Thad harder than ever, and it was evident that he was growing more nervous.

Thad made another effort to placate him, affecting not to notice his nervousness.

But as usual in such cases, he only succeeded in making matters worse.

"I met your daughter Ada in the city yesterday," he said, "and when I told her that I was coming down here, she informed me that I would find you here, and so I looked you up."

"Ada told you this?" cried the old man in as much horror as if he had been told that somebody had said that he had committed a murder.

"Yes. She said that your health had not been the best for some days past, and that you had come down here to recuperate."

"Then she told you an untruth!" and the old man began to back away from the detective as though he had been affected with a contagion. "I came here for nothing of the kind. My health is good. As good as it ever was, and I did not want to come, but she hustled me off here with that stupid Philip, to get me away from some nonsense or other. God knows what."

"Perhaps she thought your health required the salt air, Mr. Stowe," suggested Thad. "I am a very robust man, but I feel that I need it once in a while."

"All imagination. No one needs it. The city air is a thousand times better than this damp, malarial air. What's the good of my coming here, for example? I never bathe in the surf more than once a week when I'm here, and then I feel all the worse for it."

Thad was delighted with the progress he was making.

A few moments more, he mused, and he would have the old man round to the topic upon which he wanted him to converse.

He took a cigar from his pocket and lighted it.

"Ever smoke, Mr. Stowe?" he said, proffering his case to the old man.

The latter glanced cautiously about, and finally said:

"Not very often. I delight in the habit; but those deuced people have got it into their idiotic heads that it hurts me, and won't let me indulge in it."

"There is nothing the matter with you—heart disease or anything like that—to render the habit dangerous to you, is there?"

"Not a thing. I am as sound as a dollar. It is only a fancy of the idiots."

"Then why not enjoy a quiet smoke with me while you are here out of their way?"

"So I will—by your leave—thank you. You are the first sensible man I have met in a year. She keeps me shut up there with that stupid Philip and won't let me see anybody. By Jove! I'll break away, if I don't, roast me! Just keep a sharp lookout for that fellow—a gray-haired old fool like myself—till I get a light, please."

"I'll keep good watch," rejoined Thad cheerfully. "Here, take my cigar, the wind is too strong to light a match."

The old man soon set his cigar to going at the detective's, and was smoking away as happy as a lord.

As soon as the nicotine began to assert its mild influence over him the old man's hard, drawn face relaxed and he appeared to be a new man.

He chatted on cheerfully with Thad, keeping a sharp lookout the while for Philip.

Thad was gradually veering the conversation round where he wanted it and the old man had not suspected where he was going.

At length the detective began:

"I was in England some time ago, Mr. Stowe, and I learned in a roundabout way that you were an heir to some property over there—quite an extensive estate."

They had seated themselves on the sand and had been smoking and talking contentedly for some minutes.

At the mention of the estate in England the old man sprung to his feet as though a shell had exploded under him.

He dropped his cigar in the sand, his face assumed its old look of pain and distress, and he stared at the detective as though he had been some monstrosity.

"How did you learn of such a thing?" he almost gasped. "It is a lie! I have no property in England! I never was in England! It is all a trumped-up lie!"

Thad remained perfectly cool and allowed the old man to expend his fury.

When he had somewhat subsided from sheer exhaustion, Thad looked up calmly from his seat in the sand and smiled. Then picking up the other's cigar and offering it to him, he observed in as cool a tone as though he had been addressing the sanest man alive:

"You have dropped your cigar, sir."

Thad's coolness had a sedative effect on the old man.

He took the cigar mechanically and put it into his mouth.

"Sit down," demanded Thad in a gentle voice.

Stowe obeyed as though he had belonged to the detective.

"Allow me to suggest that you cease these fits of excitement," continued Thad. "You go off half-cocked before a fellow has a chance to explain himself. When I said that I had learned that you had property in England, it was for the purpose of illustrating what I was going to say about false rumors and false impressions. Of course I know that you were never in England. You were born somewhere in New England, were you not?"

The old man could make no answer, but stared at the speaker in amazement.

"You were born in Massachusetts, were you not?" supplemented the detective.

"Yes, yes, in Massachusetts—not in England," mumbled the old man in a nervous tone.

"That is what I thought. Nevertheless, as I was saying, while I was in Lychfield—"

"Lychfield!" and the old man attempted to jump up again, but Thad caught his arm and restrained him.

"Sit still!" he commanded a little harshly. "Yes, I said Lychfield. What of it? You never saw Lychfield, or any other English town, city or hamlet—not even the ghost of Hamlet, except on the stage."

Here the detective paused long enough to force a laugh at his own rather flimsy joke, and the old man sympathetically joined in.

When I was in Lychfield," pursued the detective, "I was told that a man in New York by the name of Stowe was heir to a large estate in that vicinity, and all this Stowe had to do was to sign a certain document to make the property his. I doubted the story, of course, supposing that if said Stowe—whoever he was—"

"It wasn't I, sir, it wasn't I!" cried the old man excitedly. "Believe me, sir, it was not I!"

And the old man made another effort to get upon his feet, but the detective restrained him and pulled him down upon the sand again.

"Sit still!" he demanded. "Who the dickens said it was you?"

Mr. Stowe subsided, and the detective continued:

"As I was saying, I doubted the story, supposing that this man Stowe would have to go to the other side in order to sign the paper, and knew that the Stowe—not you. Sit down!" The old man was about to jump up again. "That the Stowe in question would not want to go over, wouldn't dare to, in fact. So I made it a point to inquire into the matter, and what do you think I found?"

"Oh, mercy! Nothing about me, I hope. I never was in England!" And the old man strove heroically to get upon his feet.

"Sit still!" yelled the detective. "I don't wonder that your daughter keeps you under close watch. I'd keep a ball and chain on you if you belonged to me! Well, I found that, although this Stowe had come over to this country to escape punishment for a crime committed over there, and had changed his name—his real name being—"

"No, no, no!" fairly screeched the old man, and, in spite of Thad's efforts, succeeded in regaining his feet, and started to run.

"Stop!" yelled the detective.

For a wonder the old man obeyed.

"Come back here and sit down!"

Stowe hesitated, and acted as though he would probably do nothing of the kind.

"Come back and sit down, I say!" repeated Thad. "Come on, or by George, I'll call Philip!"

This was a happy thought.

He had no sooner mentioned the name of Philip than the poor old man trotted back as obediently as a whipped dog and squatted down in the sand beside Thad.

"Now keep quiet, will you, till I finish this story!" said the detective, taking a firm grip on his arm.

The poor old chap cast an appealing look up at the detective's face, that touched the latter's heart.

"I want you to understand, Mr. Stowe, once for all," observed he in the gentlest voice he could command, "that I am the best friend you have in the wide world. I wouldn't harm you or allow you to be harmed for all the money in this country! Do you believe that?"

The old man cast another beseeching look at him.

"Do you want any money?" he asked. "You may have all you want. I have plenty of it—three big bags full. Philip drew it all out of the bank the other day and it is in the house. Ask Ada. She knows you, and will give you all you want, only don't give Asa more than ten dollars a week. He gambles it away. I gave him a hundred dollars one day and he gambled it all away."

"No, I do not want any money," replied Thad. "I want you to have it all and to enjoy it, you and Ada."

"Yes, let Ada have it all. She is a good girl. She gives money to the poor little children and the sick. Ada is a good girl, a good girl."

"I know she is. But now keep quiet till I finish this story."

"I don't like your story," pleaded the old man. "Please tell it to somebody else. I don't want to hear it!"

"But you must. It is intended for nobody else. You've got to listen to it!"

Stowe put on a look of resignation and became silent.

"As I was saying," resumed Thad once more, "although this Stowe had been guilty of a crime for which he had to leave England, and had changed his name, the authorities decided that if he would sign a paper which was to be sent to him, without leaving the United States, mind you, or letting his neighbors here know that his name had once been something else, his share of the property would be sent to him and he would never be disturbed any more. What do you think of that?"

The old man was looking up into the detective's face, and his own wore a dreamy, half-conscious expression, as though the drift of Thad's story was just beginning to break in upon him.

"And you say this Stowe lived in New York?" he said as one speaking in reverie.

"Yes."

"And he had changed his name?"

"Exactly."

"And the English authorities had promised not to prosecute him if he would sign the documents?"

"That's it."

"What reason had they for doing so? Why were the English authorities so much interested in the transaction?"

"Because several other heirs were interested in the property, some of them poor, and it was very desirable that it should be recovered."

"Well, did Stowe sign the paper?"

"Not yet; but I hope he soon will. I have them here. Perhaps he will sign them before we leave Newport, and—"

"Not if I know myself!" cried a voice. And the next instant Philip stepped between them.

CHAPTER XXI.

MORE PLOTTING.

AT sight of Philip the old man cringed as though he had been the man's slave.

The fellow gave the old man a severe look and then turned and scowled at Thad.

The latter by this time had regained his feet, and glared back at him.

"Well, sir, what do you want here?" demanded Philip, who was the first to break the silence.

"That is exactly the question I was about to ask you!" retorted the detective fiercely.

"I belong here!" growled the other.

"So do I. These sands are as much my property as yours; and I demand to know by what authority you come between me and my friend here and interrupt our conversation?"

The other laughed and showed his teeth like a dog.

"If I deemed you worthy of an answer, I should tell you that I have the right of the keeper of this poor unfortunate whom you are trying to inveigle into some scheme to rob him."

"And I do deem you worthy of my answer to your insinuation, and it is that you are a liar and a cur! It is you who are inveigling. This man is as sane as yourself, and you are using your low cunning to frighten and intimidate him and keep him in your power. But, mind my words! I will deliver him from your accursed power and put you where you belong before a month is over!"

The fellow scowled but made no reply.

He cast a contemptuous glance at Thad, and then turning to the old man who was still cowering at his feet, and taking him by the arm lifted him rudely from the ground.

"Come!" he growled. "You must go to the house. You must not talk to this man!"

"I don't want to go!" cried the old man piteously. "He is my friend! He is willing to help me, do everything, and will take no money! I like him. He is my friend. I want to remain with him!"

"But you must come!" snarled Philip. "You shall come!" And he began forcing the poor old man along.

"Stop!" shouted Thad, pushing up his sleeves. "Leave that old man here, if he wishes to remain, or I shall make dogs' meat of you in about two seconds! Let him go, I tell you!"

The other hesitated, and removed his hand from the old man's arm.

Whereupon the demented man slunk back toward Thad and stood looking appealingly at him for protection.

Thad noticed this and placed himself between him and the ruffian.

"Now go on about your business!" commanded the detective, "unless you want the worst drubbing you ever had!"

"Don't allow him to take me away with him!" pleaded the old man, crouching close to Thad.

"Have no fear, my poor old friend," said Thad reassuringly. "He shall not take you away while I have a good right arm."

Philip ground his teeth in his rage.

"You'd better let that old man go with me, if you don't want to get yourself in the lock-up," he warned menacingly.

"What do you mean?" demanded Thad.

"I mean that the authorities here know me and know that I am the guardian of that man, and all I will have to say will be that you are a confidence man, and they will lock you up mighty quick."

Thad laughed derisively.

"Try that game and see who will be locked up! There is not an official in the State who does not know me better than he does you. All I will have to do will be to let them know who I am and prefer charges against you for conspiring to swindle and rob the old man as you did when you induced him to withdraw his money from the bank so that the burglars whom you had leagued yourself with, could get it!"

At this Philip turned as white as a corpse, and seemed on the point of quitting the scene forthwith, when suddenly he appeared to have an inspiration.

His face lighted up and he assumed a defiant attitude, and stepping to Mr. Stowe's side, he whispered loud enough for Thad to hear:

"Stowe, do you know who that is?"

"It is my friend! My good friend!" responded the old man, clinging to Thad's arm.

"Don't let him take me away, good friend!"

"Have no fear," responded Thad kindly.

"He shall not take you."

"That man is a detective, Stowe!" cried Philip. "He wants to get you into his power and take you back to England and hang you for the murder of John Stetson!"

The effect of the rascal's words were magical. The old man's face became a picture of abject terror, and he shrank from Thad as from a leper.

The game was up unless Thad could counteract the effect of the man's statement.

With assumed calmness, he laughed good-naturedly.

"It is another of his lies, my old friend," he

said kindly. "I am no more a detective than he is. I am only your good friend."

This did the business. The imbecile was only too eager to distrust the other's words, and crouched back to Thad again.

"Yes, yes, I knew it!" he cried ecstatically. "I knew that you were no detective! Yes, yes, you are my good friend! Don't let him take me away!"

"Be calm, my dear old friend, he shall not take you," rejoined the detective.

"I tell you he is a detective!" shouted Philip. "Come on or he will have you in prison!"

"He is a liar cried Thad."

"No he is not," came a quiet voice close at hand. "He is telling the truth. This man is a detective. I know him, papa!"

All turned to look, and who should step to the front but Ada!

As she turned upon Thad, with a smile, at the same time flashing her wonderful eyes upon him, he realized that she it was whom he had seen in the train, and she it was who had put her head in at his door at the hotel.

"A little too sharp for you yet, Mr. Burr!" she laughed. "You did not dream that I was onto your little game when you left the house last night, nor did you dream that it was poor little I whose eyes disturbed you so, on the train. I have taken your advice, you see. Do you remember of advising me last night to turn detective?"

Thad, too much upset and chagrined to reply, walked away.

"Never mind, my pert little miss," he mused. "You are not done with Thad Burr yet. Your day of reckoning will come sooner than you expect."

After a little reflection the detective rather rejoiced at the result of his adventure.

He had broken the ice with the old man, and made it that much easier to begin the next time he got at him.

He returned to the hotel and, acquainting the landlord and clerk with his profession so that they would understand the meaning of the various disguises which he might adopt, he went to his room and altered his make-up to that of a venerable old gentleman with a flowing white beard.

He then sallied forth in search of his old friend.

Thad strolled along the shore for some time, but saw nothing of the old man or any of his attendants.

He even approached the cottage, but everything appeared deserted, and not a soul was to be seen.

What could it mean?

Had they shifted the old man to some other place?

After reconnoitering about the cottage for some time the detective made bold to ring the bell.

A servant came to the door, of whom Thad inquired whether the family had left the beach or not.

No, they had not left yet. They had simply gone out for a drive; but they intended leaving on the following day.

"Going to Narragansett, I presume," suggested Thad.

"No, sir, I think not," was the reply. "I think they either intend going to the mountains or back to New York."

"What mountains?"

"I do not know, sir. Probably White Mountains, though."

"You have no idea when they will be back, of course?"

"From the mountains?"

"No, from their drive."

"No, sir. Probably not until late this afternoon, though."

"Thank you."

"Who shall I say called, sir?"

The only person whom Thad could recall at the moment who would come anywhere near suiting his description and who had ever been in the habit of calling upon Stowe, was a certain doctor.

"Dr. Blackman," he answered, on a venture.

From the look the servant gave him, Thad feared that he had made a mistake in giving that name, as the servant probably knew the doctor in question. However, he was too polite to express his doubts as to the detective's identity, and merely responded:

"Very well, sir," and shut the door.

Thad returned to the hotel for lunch, and afterward went down upon the beach to watch the bathers and keep a lookout for his man.

But, although he spent the afternoon wandering along the beach and occasionally approaching within easy view of the cottage, he saw nothing of any of the people connected with the old man, much less the old man himself.

As dusk approached and the bathers began to desert the beach, Thad seated himself in a comfortable position in full view of the cottage, but where he could not be seen by any of its occupants, and took up his vigil.

Here he remained until long after dark, and until the lights were lit and shone from the cottage windows, but he saw nobody approach the house, either in a drag or on foot.

He then arose and approached the cottage.

Some of the windows were open and he could survey the interior of the lower floor, but for a long time he could see no one except the servants. He saw no signs of packing, however, and concluded that the footman who had told him they intended going the next day had been acting under instructions, and had lied.

He was about to turn away in despair of seeing any of the family that night, when suddenly a shadow flitted across the curtains of one of the draped windows, and the next instant he saw a female head shadowed against the curtain. It needed but a glance of Thad's experienced eye to tell him whose head it was.

It was that of Ada.

He drew close to the window and concealed himself in a clump of shrubbery which grew just under it.

The window was open, although the blind was drawn, and Thad could distinctly hear all that went on within.

Ada was engaged in earnest conversation with some one—a man—but the nature of the conversation was such that for a long time he could make nothing of it.

After awhile, however, they began to speak of matters in which he was interested and he could understand the drift of their discourse.

"Yes," said Ada, in answer to a question from her companion, "I quite agree with you. We have got to get him clear away from here. I have succeeded in outwitting the detective so far and keeping him at a distance—at least, until this afternoon. He managed to approach my father on the beach and was in conversation with him when Philip found him, and it is only a matter of time when he will succeed in his plan if we remain here."

"What is the detective's plan, do you imagine?"

"Why, his ostensible object is to get papa to sign some document which he claims is necessary in order to recover an estate in which papa is interested; but his real motive is to get him in his clutches, inveigle him aboard an English vessel and take him back to the other side where they can try him for the murder. This could easily be done in papa's present state of mind. Your idea of taking him to France is a good one, and I shall act upon it at once. You say the ship sails to-morrow?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

"I can get him ready by that time, by leaving here to-night for Boston. We will hoodwink the detective by sailing from Boston. There was somebody called here this afternoon who represented himself as Dr. Blackman, but as that gentleman is in California, I knew that it could not have been he, and I am inclined to think that it was this detective in disguise. The servant, according to instructions, told him that we had all gone out for a drive, and that we would leave here to-morrow for White Mountains, so that when he misses us to-morrow he will run away to the White Mountains, and by the time he discovers his mistake we will be well out to sea."

Ada's companion laughed.

"You are an empress in trickery, Miss Stowe," he observed. "But will not this fellow follow you?"

"It is hardly likely. The expense would be too great for him, for one thing; and it is not likely that he has ever been abroad, so that he would scarcely dare to undertake the expedition. If he should, however, we can dodge him there as well as here. There is one thing in our favor, we have got papa so badly frightened over the narrow escape he had this afternoon that he is not likely to allow any one to approach him again without our knowledge."

"But you have said nothing about my being allowed to accompany you, Miss Ada," interposed the gentleman.

"That is with yourself. If you desire to go, Mr. Bailey, you know you are more than welcome."

"Then I shall go, by all means."

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRUGGLE IN THE DARK.

"WELL, my cunning young miss," mused Thad, at this point in the conversation, "you imagine you are going to deceive the old fellow, and send him off on a wild-goose chase to the White Mountains, do you? You will be a little surprised, in my opinion, when you find that he has taken passage on the same vessel with you!"

As the two people ceased speaking, Thad concluded that they were done or had left the room, and he was about leaving his place of concealment, when he heard Ada's voice, nearer him than before, and looking to one side of where he was concealed, he saw the two come out upon a balcony not two yards from him.

"You will find it much cooler out here," observed Ada as they seated themselves.

"Yes, the breeze from the bay is delightful to-night," rejoined her companion.

Thad could see the speakers plainly from where he stood, and he saw that the young man, although undoubtedly the house-painter whom

he had seen with Ada on the car that night, was now dressed in the costume of a refined gentleman, and had every appearance of such.

He must have been dressed in the manner in which the detective had first seen him then for the purpose of disguise.

Nevertheless, Thad knew him no less by his face, which was rather a strong one, than by his voice.

"You spoke of Philip awhile ago," resumed Ada, after a pause, "do you really think that he is what you imagine?"

"I have not the least doubt of it," responded Bailey. "I might have been prejudiced against the fellow at first, and indeed, his actions, no less than his face, are enough to prejudice any one. But I have seen enough lately to convince me that he is a rascal."

"I must confess that I have never liked him from the first. He had not been in the house a week before you would have thought he owned it. Do you know that your opinion of the man tallies exactly with that of the detective?"

"How do you know that?" he asked in surprise.

"I had an interview—unwillingly on my part—with the detective the other night."

"What does he say about Philip?"

"That he is a rascal and a cad."

"That he is a cad goes without saying. His face shows that."

"The detective affects to know that he was responsible for papa committing the folly of drawing all his money out of the bank on the day of the attempted robbery, and that he was in league with the robbers."

"I shouldn't wonder a bit."

"I wish we could get rid of him. I am sure that if he goes abroad with us something terrible will happen to some of us."

"Why don't you get rid of him then? It is easy enough."

"Not so easy as you imagine."

"Why?"

"He is in possession of papa's secret, and he is just the man to exploit it if he is crossed in any of his purposes. Indeed, he has used that as a menace to keep papa under his power ever since he came."

"It was very foolish of you or your papa to make him acquainted with so important a secret in the first place."

"We did not. Papa has never told a living soul of his secret, and the only ones I have ever told have been yourself and Mrs. Watson, and that was only because I desired your help in following this detective."

"How did Philip discover it then?"

"It appears that he knew it in the old country. In fact, he knew papa in his native town. So, after he had been here awhile he let my father know that he was acquainted with his past, and from that day to this papa has been his slave. I actually believe that papa will become a raving maniac if something is not done soon to relieve him of the influence of this man. I can see that the strain is telling on him day by day."

"Then I should not hesitate a moment in giving this man his walking-papers, and let him do his worst. So long as your father remains on this side of the water no harm can come to him."

"But the public would know of it, and it would come to papa's ears sooner or later, and the knowledge that his secret was known to the world would either kill him or render him insane. If he suspected that I knew it, the fact would kill him, I am sure."

The young man was silent for some moments. At length he looked up suddenly as though he had been visited with an inspiration.

"I have an idea, Ada," he said.

"What is it?"

"Why not have a square talk with this detective and see if we cannot strike a bargain with him?"

"What kind of a bargain?"

"If he can give a satisfactory guarantee that if the old gentleman will sign the document in question he (the detective) will not molest him further or make the affair public, to allow your father to do it, provided the detective will use his power and influence to thwart whatever schemes Philip might have."

"I have thought of that," answered Ada; "but it won't do."

"Why not?"

"You cannot trust the detective. There is too large a reward for papa's conviction."

"Still, at this late day?"

"Yes."

"Who is offering a reward at this late date?"

"The relations of the murdered man. It has become a rule in the family that whoever falls heir to the homestead and consequently the bulk of the property must provide in his will for a reward of ten thousand pounds for the conviction of the murderer of John."

"Fifty thousand dollars is a good deal of money, but in doing this you come in possession of the estate, which will probably amount to several times that amount. Suppose you give, say two hundred thousand dollars to the detective to enter into collusion with you in this thing? He will accept it quickly enough."

"I fear the thing could not be done without apprising my father of the facts, and the result, as I say, would be fatal."

For some moments Thad's attention had been divided between the speakers and a mysterious figure which was moving slowly and cautiously around the base of the balcony toward him, keeping in the shadow in order to escape observation.

By this time it had so far round as to be within a yard of the detective, and was evidently making for the same umbrage that was furnishing him a hiding-place.

If it came three feet further it must come in contact with him.

What was to be done?

He was sure to be detected if the figure advanced another step in his direction.

But at that moment a remark from the young man on the balcony caused the figure to pause.

"Well, if you are afraid to trust the detective, Ada, I have another plan. This man Philip must be got rid of somehow. Suppose you say nothing to him about your plan of going abroad, and make some excuse for sending him away some place—say back to New York, on some errand. Start him off in the morning, and it will take him until to-morrow night to get back, and when he does return we will be well out to sea."

Ada shook her head doubtfully.

"It would only aggravate matters. He would follow us, and when he joined us, he would be worse than before."

"You could make the excuse of going aboard the vessel and being carried away by accident. But you can prevent him following you easily enough."

"How?"

"Arrange it so that he can get no money."

"But he carries papa's check-book and has full authority to draw all the money he wants in papa's name."

"Can you not persuade your papa to demand his check-book?"

"I am afraid not. Papa has so much confidence in him that he believes his money would not be safe if the check-book were in anybody else's hands."

"The scoundrel!" cried Bailey. "He has evidently worked upon your papa's feelings with the charm of the devil! I would like to see the wretch hanged!"

As the sound of this vehement ejaculation died away Thad was startled to hear the figure near him grind its teeth and mutter:

"Yes, curse you, I have no doubt of it! And there will be others to wish that before I get through with you! But you have got more of a man to deal with than you imagine when you tackle old Philip Thornburg! I'll outwit you all!"

Although this soliloquy had been uttered in a voice scarcely above a whisper, the speaker was so close to the detective that it was plainly audible to him.

As the crouching figure, whom Thad now knew to be Philip, ceased to mutter, he took a step backward in order to bring himself in a position to see the couple on the balcony, and in doing so came plump against the detective.

The instant he felt the contact of Thad's body against his own, the fellow turned with the rapidity of lightning and grappled with the detective.

He made a clutch for Thad's throat, but only succeeded in getting hold of his collar.

Thad, on the contrary, was more fortunate, for he clutched the fellow's throat with a vise-like gripe.

As he closed down upon Philip's windpipe, the latter evidently believed his time had come, and took advantage of the last bit of breath that was allowed to pass his thorax to let off an agonizing scream that was loud and shrill enough to raise the dead.

"What is that?" cried Ada, and ran terrified into the house.

Not so with Bailey, however.

He stood calm and deliberately peered down into the darkness in the endeavor to ascertain what was going on.

In the mean time Thad had hurled his man to the earth and was pummeling him in good fashion.

The fellow could not utter another scream owing to the deathlike grasp Thad had upon his windpipe, but he managed to groan in a horrible manner.

Bailey stood irresolute for a moment only, and then sprang down from the balcony.

When he was beside the two prostrate men he stooped over to discern who or what it was, and finally making out that it was one man on top of another, he grasped Thad by the collar and attempted to pull him off.

This he could not do, of course, so he straightened up and said in a calm tone:

"I do not know who you are or what your grievance is, my good man, but for God's sake, don't kill him!"

Thad released his man and arose to his feet, and no sooner had he done so, when Philip jumped up.

"Philip, by all that's unholy!" cried Bailey.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SERIOUS LOSS.

BAILEY and Philip glared at each other for several seconds before either spoke.

The light shone full upon their faces so that Thad could see the expression of each, and he had never seen two more malignant faces in his life.

The detective stood back further and was concealed by the darkness, and neither of the others gave him any attention.

The blood was trickling down Philip's face, rendering him more unprepossessing than before.

"So, you were eavesdropping us, were you?" hissed Bailey at length. "I hope you heard what honest people think of you!"

Thad expected to see Philip fly at him tooth and nail, or at least retort in kind.

But, to his surprise, he did neither.

Instead, he scowled a little more darkly and added to it a hangdog expression, such as a man might wear who had been caught stealing, and answered almost humbly:

"N—no, I wasn't. I heard this fellow out here and thought he was a burglar, which I still think he is, and came down to see. The moment I turned the angle of the house there he pounced upon me."

Bailey turned to look at Thad, and the latter, perfectly willing to be inspected, stepped out into the light.

The expression of Bailey's face underwent a radical change.

He first looked surprised and later almost gently at what he took for a respectable old gentleman.

"Why, I am inclined to doubt your theory," he observed. "This looks to me like a respectable old gentleman. Can it be he who was pummeling you?"

"Yes, that is the man, and he is a burglar I'm sure. I'll call a policeman."

Thad smiled benevolently.

"You had better not," he suggested. "The officer might take the wrong man if I told my story."

"How was this, old gentleman?" asked Bailey.

"Simply this: I chanced to be coming past here—I had been out for a stroll, as is my wont in the evening before retiring, and saw yourself and the young lady sitting on the balcony. I was about to pass on quietly, only bestowing a casual glance upon what I supposed to be two happy lovers, which reminded me of the happiest days of my life, when I noticed some one crouching in the shadow of the balcony, casting an occasional sinister glance up at you as though he meant devilry, and believing that your young lives were in danger, I approached the skulking fellow. The moment he saw me he sprang at me like a tiger at its prey. But thank fortune, I spent a little time in my youth learning the art of self-defense, and before the fellow knew what he was about, I fancy, he was upon his back and I on top of him as you found me."

"That has more the ring of truth about it than your story, Mr. Philip," remarked Bailey, turning upon the now thoroughly crushed man.

Philip could not answer a word.

He could not tell that Thad's story was not entirely true.

So far as he knew, it was absolutely true.

The fellow slunk away muttering to himself.

As soon as Philip had disappeared Bailey turned to Thad, and putting out his hand, said:

"Allow me to thank you, sir, for your friendly solicitude for this young lady and myself. I have no doubt that this fellow meant mischief, and you have probably saved the life of one or both of us."

"Do not mention it, I beg," responded the detective kindly. "It was no more than I should expect you or any other man to do for me under similar circumstances."

"But I insist that you have done us a great favor," continued Bailey, wringing his hand warmly. "I trust you will favor me with your name and address."

Thad gave him a name and address in New York, at which the young man, added:

"I shall make it a point to call upon you as soon as I return to this country. I am going to start abroad to-morrow."

"Herbert!" came a gentle voice from the balcony.

Glancing up the two men saw Ada standing there. Her exclamation had been intended as an admonition to Bailey, who, she thought, was telling too much to the stranger.

Thad noticed the girl was very pale and somewhat agitated, which told him that she understood the position of affairs.

"This gentleman," observed Bailey, "saved our lives just now, and we cannot feel too grateful toward him, Ada."

"I have heard your conversation and understand the situation," she responded in her gentlest voice, "and he has my heartiest thanks. I trust we shall meet again, sir."

"I am sure we shall," rejoined the detective, politely, "possibly abroad, as I shall sail in a few days. But I must bid you good-night, for it is after my bedtime, and I am not in the habit

of varying my pastime with a rough-and-tumble as I have to-night, and I naturally feel a little fatigued."

"Good-night, and God bless you!" cried Ada. "The same to you, and a thousand of them, young lady!" responded Thad, and wringing Bailey's hand once more, took his leave.

As Thad passed the angle of a bow-window that jutted out on another end of the cottage, he caught a glimpse of a crouching form which he guessed to be that of Philip, and believing that he had either been lying in ambush for him or intended some other mischief, he made a spring for the fellow, but the latter had evidently had enough for one night, and, eluding Thad's grasp, took to his heels and escaped.

Thad then returned to the hotel, and, as he had no occasion to start for Boston that night, and had nothing particular to do, concluded to retire and recuperate for the morrow's work.

It was late when he reached the hotel, but remembering that he had had no dinner, he took a cold lunch, the best he could do that night, and went to bed.

He lay awake for a long time after retiring, thinking over the stirring events of the day, and of the near approach to victory he had made, only to be defeated at last, and wondering how long this cunning miss would succeed in keeping it away from him.

He was pretty well settled now as to the character of Philip, and hoped against hope that the fellow would not sail with the party on the following day.

Still, the open rupture between him and Ada would probably militate in his favor. But the fellow would doubtless manage to patch up a reconciliation until he had gained his end, whatever that was.

And this suggested another thought to the detective.

What was the fellow working for?

Had he not gained the ascendancy over the old man for a selfish purpose?

There could be no doubt of that.

But how far would he dare to carry it?

Philip was in possession of the old man's secret, and knew, doubtless, that the princely reward had been offered for his head.

He also knew that by signing the documents in Thad's possession, Mr. Stowe would come into another large sum of money.

What was to hinder the rascal from inveigling the old man over to England and giving him up to the authorities, and then, when he was safely under lock and key, communicating with the attorneys in charge of the estate, who, on learning the status of affairs, would demand the return of the documents for the old man to sign, when he (Philip) would pocket the reward and the bulk of the property?

The thought of the possibility of such a transaction caused the detective a good deal of uneasiness and prevented him from sleeping for some time, but he finally managed to divest his mind of it by mentally vowing to leave no stone unturned until he had won his case and brought the rascal to justice if such he proved to be, after which he dropped into slumber.

Thad could not have slept very long, for it was after midnight when he went to sleep, and still dark when he suddenly awoke with a sense of strangling as though the room were full of smoke, and his first impression was that the house was afire.

But added to the smothering sensation was a feeling of nausea, and, when he attempted to rise, his head swam so that he reeled and fell.

He then realized that there was something more than ordinary smoke in the room. With a desperate effort the detective made out to drag himself to a window, but for several seconds he was unable to rise from the floor and was consequently unable to raise the window.

He knew, however, that if he remained in that atmosphere very long unconsciousness would ensue, which would in turn be followed by death, so, concentrating all the nerve he possessed in one mighty effort, aided by his indomitable will-power, he succeeded in pulling himself up by the window-ledge to an upright position, and throwing all his remaining strength into the exertion, managed to raise the window.

He had not been a second too soon, for his vitality was fast ebbing when he caught the first breath of fresh air.

As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to realize fully what had happened, he knew that an attempt had been made upon his life.

Then it was, when the danger was all over, that a loud rapping came at his door.

For some minutes after the first rapping occurred, and until after it had been repeated several times, he was unable to stagger to the door and open it.

It was the clerk, and he demanded in an angry tone if Thad did not know that the gas was escaping in his room.

"I have just discovered it," returned the detective in a feeble voice.

"Why in thunder don't you turn it off, then?" cried the clerk, who doubtless imagined that Thad had attempted suicide.

And the indignant clerk strode over to the gas-burner and turned off the escaping gas.

"What are you trying to do, old gentleman?"

demanding the hotel man. "Kill yourself by blowing out the gas?"

By this time Thad had recovered sufficiently to explain as far as he knew what had happened.

The clerk stared wildly at him. "What time did you retire?" he finally faltered.

"About eleven, I should think."

"Then your friend woke you up?"

Thad looked at him in surprise.

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't your friend come up here a little while ago?"

"Nobody has been here that I know of."

It was now the clerk's turn to look astonished.

"Do you mean to say that nobody came up here about ten minutes ago and let himself in with a key?"

"If he did I did not know anything about it."

"You astonish me! A man came into the office a few minutes ago and asked where your room was. I told him, and he came up. A minute afterward he came back and told me that you had lost the key and could not let him in and requested me to furnish another till you found yours in the morning. I gave him another key and he came up again."

"Did you see him come down?"

"No. I supposed he was still in the room."

"What kind of a looking man was he?"

"A thickset, middle-aged man with grayish hair and beard."

"That is he!" mused Thad aloud.

"Sir?"

"That is the man who attempted to take my life by coming into my room and turning on the gas!"

The clerk turned ashen.

"Heavens! Probably he has robbed you!" he exclaimed.

"No, I hardly think so, as I have nothing worth his while. No, I know the fellow, and his motive for murdering me was not for robbery. He has a purpose deeper than that. Good-night. Don't let anybody else come up, please."

"That I won't," responded the clerk, and went down stairs.

When Thad returned into the room it just occurred to him that it might be as well to investigate and see whether Philip Thornburg had been mean enough to rob as well as attempt to murder him.

He took down his coat and went through the pockets.

The first pocket was found to be intact, but the second one had not fared so well.

Something was missing.

Horrors! It was the documents which he had brought down for the old man to sign!

His theory about Philip Thornburg's plans was not, so far, correct after all.

But he would catch the fellow before he got out of Newport, so hastily dressing himself, he lost no time in reaching the cottage.

The family had departed on the midnight train for Boston, accompanied by Philip!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER THE FUGITIVES.

WHEN Thad discovered that Ada and the rest of them had gone he hastened to the depot to see when the next train would depart for Boston.

To his great disappointment, he found that the first train was at 6:15 the following morning.

Still, when he reflected that they could not sail before the next afternoon, he concluded that it did not matter much, as he could reach Boston by the morning train several hours before the steamer would sail.

He therefore returned to the hotel in a tolerably cheerful state of mind, though a trifle dizzy from the gas he had inhaled during the night.

As his mind reverted to the attempted murder, an idea occurred to him that staggered him for an instant.

Why had he overlooked it before?

Possibly on account of his dazed condition.

But, now that he thought of it, the attempt upon his life must have been made somewhere between two and three in the morning, as, according to the clerk, the fellow had called at the office only fifteen minutes or so before he (the clerk) came up and discovered the gas escaping, and when Thad left the room not more than fifteen minutes after this, it was exactly three o'clock.

Now, as the last train had gone at 12:20, the attempted murderer could not have gone on that train.

So that the servant who informed the detective that Philip had gone with the family had either been mistaken or had deliberately lied, as he had done when he told Thad that the family had gone for a drive in the afternoon.

Philip, then, must still be somewhere in Newport.

The question was, would he go to Boston the next morning and accompany the family to France?

Possibly not.

There would have to be a reconciliation between him and Ada first.

But what good would the documents which he had stolen from the detective do him, unless he could corral the old man?

A horrible suspicion flashed upon Thad.

Philip would probably take another ship and take his chances of encountering the family abroad.

If he could get hold of the old man while in Paris, for instance, it would be a simple matter to hustle him across the Channel to England.

Thad determined, therefore, to keep a sharp lookout for him and, if possible, arrest him before he set sail.

He could do this, as he had ample grounds for action, since the fellow had entered his room clandestinely and committed theft.

The detective threw himself upon his bed, without undressing, but did not sleep.

His mind was too much disturbed to permit of sleep.

At a little after five Thad arose and made his toilet.

He did not wait for breakfast, but hurried off to the depot.

He had several minutes to wait for the train, and he employed it in strolling about, watching the faces of everybody who came and went about the depot.

At length the train arrived.

Philip had not yet put in an appearance.

What was to be done?

If he waited for a later train he might miss the fellow altogether.

Now that he thought of it, Philip might have gone by boat.

There was but one thing to be done, and that was to take this train for Boston and watch there for Philip, until the steamer sailed.

If he did not put in an appearance by that time, go abroad and sail with Ada and her two friends.

By that means he could keep near the old man and, if he did not himself get a chance to finish up the interrupted transaction, he could at least prevent Philip from taking possession of him.

Having arrived at this conclusion, which he did all within the short time between the train's arrival and departure, Thad boarded the train and was soon whirling away toward Boston.

It was scarcely light in the cars, owing to a cloudy morning, and the detective did not bother himself about the balance of the passengers for some time, but busied himself with his own thoughts.

He was still disguised as an old gentleman, the same that he had worn the night before, and he knew that nobody, except it was Philip, would recognize him.

After a while his penchant for studying faces asserted itself, and the first he knew he was scrutinizing, one after another, ever face in the car.

This had gone on for some time, and he had brought his scrutiny down (beginning at the further end of the car) to within three seats from him.

Of course, in some instances he had not been able to see the faces, but in such cases he invariably made up his mental notes from the shape and pose of the backs of their heads.

When he reached the third seat from him the same state of affairs existed. The back of a head—or rather two of them—met his gaze. But one in particular interested him.

It was a square, cone-shaped head, covered with iron-gray hair and set upon a thick, strong neck, strikingly suggestive of the bull.

Without suspecting who the owner was, Thad set him down as a man of low moral and intellectual caliber, and possessed of a certain low cunning and an insatiable lust for gain.

Having made this mental memorandum, he was about to pass on to the next person in his turn, when the owner of the last head he had just examined turned to look out of the window, exhibiting the side of his face.

Thad was almost paralyzed at the sight.

It was Philip!

How had he got on the train without the detective seeing him?

Evidently he had gone to another station and taken the train. And this proved that he was trying to evade the detective (if he had escaped death) or somebody else.

Thad's first impulse at sight of the scoundrel was to rush upon him and knock him down. But like all of his sudden impulses, he checked it in time to consider the folly of the action.

He sat quiet for some time considering the best course to take, and while he was doing so the train stopped at a station, and the two passengers occupying the seat immediately behind Philip got off.

Thad took advantage of the vacant seat and occupied it.

He found that Philip was engaged in conversation with the other occupant of the seat, and listened.

Philip was talking at the moment, and being near the conclusion of a long harangue about something, Thad could make nothing of it. But at its conclusion his companion's rejoinder attracted the detective's interest.

"Your scheme may be all right," said he, "so far as Ada and Bailey are concerned; but don't forget that you have somebody else to deal with."

"Eh?" grunted Philip.

"The detective."

Philip chuckled.

"There's no danger of him," he growled.

"What do you mean?"

Philip made a significant sign.

"You don't mean to say that you—"

"Never mind," interrupted Philip. "Suffice it that he won't molest us again."

"Are you sure?"

"I wish I was as sure of salvation."

"That isn't very sure as it now stands, that's sure," chuckled the other.

"Perhaps not; but I'm betting dollars to nothing that the detective won't bother us."

"I hope you are right, and if you are, we are safe enough. You say you have the papers?"

"Yes, I have them safe."

At that moment Philip's companion turned his head to one side, and Thad recognized him at once.

It was Asa Templeton!

That these two worthies were hatching a plan there was not the shadow of a doubt; but what it was Thad could not gather from the meager fragment of conversation which he had been able to catch.

Philip undoubtedly believed that he had succeeded in putting an end to Thad's life, which would be to his advantage, from the fact that the rascal would be off his guard.

Thad soon decided upon the course he should take.

The moment the train arrived in Boston he would have the man arrested for burglary and held subject to extradition into Rhode Island, where the deed was committed.

He knew the fellow could not procure bail and would be locked up.

In the mean time the papers would be restored to him (Thad) and he could take the steamer with Ada and her friends without fear of molestation at the hands of Philip.

The train by this time was running into the suburbs of Boston.

At length it stopped at one of the suburban stations.

Thad was looking out of the window at the moment.

But just as the train came to a standstill, he turned his gaze in the direction of the men in the seat in front of him.

They were gone!

Thad glanced toward the door of the car, but did not see them.

He lost no time in speculation.

Grasping his sachel, he dashed out on the car platform.

The passengers for that station were just beginning to alight.

Thad scanned every face, but it was no use.

His men were not there.

He sprang onto the station platform and began to push his way through the crowd.

Every face that came near him was closely scanned, but to no purpose.

He could see nothing of them.

Finally he reached the outer limits of the crowd, and stood watching the passengers as they entered the long row of 'buses.

He had not been doing so long, when two men appeared, scarcely twenty yards from him, and seemed to be on the point of entering a 'bus.

A glance told the detective that they were his men.

He bounded from the platform and started in pursuit.

He was within a few feet of them, and the foremost was about climbing into the omnibus.

It was Templeton.

Philip was behind.

He glanced casually in Thad's direction, and his face grew livid with terror.

The man did not lose his presence of mind, however, and clutching his companion by the arm, jerked him back by sheer force, at the same time whispering something to him.

This had all occupied but a few seconds' time, and before the detective had time to cover the short intervening space between them, the men dodged away from the rear of the 'bus and plunged into the surging throng.

Thad was close upon their heels and gaining upon them momentarily.

At one moment he would lose sight of the fugitives as some one would crowd in front of him, but he would soon catch sight of them again.

Finally the crowd began to grow less dense and the fugitives quickened their pace, and so did Thad.

Thus nearly a block had been traversed since they had left the station, and Thad was but twenty feet behind the men, when suddenly they sprang from the sidewalk into the street and started to run. The action was so unexpected that they managed to gain several yards on the detective before he realized the situation.

He followed their example and also took to the street; but just as he was beginning to close up the space between them, they dodged into a blind court and by the time Thad had reached the court the men had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXV.

DESPAIR.

THAD saw that it would be a waste of time to look for the fugitives in the blind court into which they had dodged, and gave up the chase. He was nearly exhausted from running, and weak from want of food.

So the first thing he attended to was his appetite.

After a hearty breakfast, he felt much revived and began to think about the work before him.

The first move he desired to make was to find Ada and her friends.

This could be accomplished, no doubt, by watching the steamer that was to sail that afternoon, but he desired to find them before then and either warn them of the presence of Philip in the city, or keep a guard over the old man himself until the party were safely aboard.

Thad set about the task by going first to one prominent hotel and then another, and examining the registers.

This he continued for some time, and nearly all the leading hotels had been visited and the forenoon wasted, and still he had found no trace of them.

He was in despair.

Was it possible that the party had not come to Boston after all, but had gone to New York with the intention of sailing from that port?

If so, he would miss them entirely.

There was one consolation, however. Philip would also miss them.

He had but a few hours to spare before the time at which the vessel was advertised to sail, and Thad determined to make the most of it.

He paid hasty visits to the remaining hotels of any prominence, only to meet with the same luck that he had had before.

Consulting his watch, he saw that it was after two, and the steamer sailed at four. Less than two hours in which to accomplish his object.

There was but one alternative left him now—visit the shipping offices of the steamer which was to sail at four.

This he did, and inquired whether the party had purchased tickets or not.

They had not.

Was there any other place at which they might have purchased tickets?

Yes, a dozen of them.

That appeared to settle the matter.

There was no time to visit a dozen, or even half a dozen offices.

The only thing to be done was to watch the steamer and see whether they went aboard or not. If they were late, he would have little time to procure his own ticket, and yet he did not wish to go to the expense of a passage if they did not go.

Thad went to the pier where the steamer lay, and, after making himself known to the watchman, was allowed to go aboard.

An examination of the passenger list showed that the party had not registered, and of course were not aboard.

The detective did not neglect to look for Philip Thornburg's name, but it was not there either. If he had shipped, he had done so under a fictitious name.

Having satisfied himself that the party were not aboard, Thad decided to go ashore, but to watch the gang-plank until it was drawn in.

He had just stepped upon the pier and was about to saunter away for a short turn, intending to keep within sight of the gangway, when somebody touched him on the arm.

Turning about who should he see but Ada!

Bailey was with her, but stood a little aside, allowing her to make the advance.

Thad noticed that the girl was pale and her face was drawn and sad, while her eyes exhibited unmistakable signs of recent weeping.

The detective was alarmed, for he had a presentiment that some misfortune had befallen her.

"Why, it is—the young lady!" exclaimed the detective. He had nearly said Miss Stowe, but realized in time that that would have betrayed him.

"Yes," she said breathlessly. "Pardon me for addressing you—a stranger—but you are the gentleman who saved our lives last night at Newport, are you not?"

"I am the man who interfered in your behalf—yes, miss."

"I thought so. You see, I haven't a friend in Boston, and—ad papa is gone! and you seemed almost like a friend—"

"Gone!" gasped Thad, unable to restrain himself.

He might have made strange of the matter and pretended, for the sake of concealing his identity, that he knew nothing of the matter; but he felt that the time for concealment had passed. The only thing for the future was to be this girl's friend and make her his.

"Yes, sir," she rejoined. "You see, we intended to sail on this steamer, in order to get papa—"

"Do not stop to explain, Miss Stowe," interposed Thad. "I know it all. Only tell me how your father escaped you."

The girl stepped back and stared at the detective in amazement.

"Why, who are you, sir?" she almost gasped.

"Detective Burr, at your service, miss!"

The impetuous girl could not restrain herself.

She actually flew at Thad and embraced him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you are here, Mr. Burr!" she cried rapturously. "I know you will find papa, and punish that villain who has taken him away."

Thad gently disengaged her arms from about his neck.

"You may depend upon that, my dear girl," he replied in a gentle voice, "for I have admired you from our first meeting, no less for your cunning than your devotion to your stricken father. Philip has taken him away, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did it happen?"

"We put up at a small inn where papa and I were acquainted, and after breakfast this morning papa and the lady who keeps the house—a very old friend of his—went out for a walk. They had been gone but a little while when the lady came running back and informed us that two men had alighted from a hack which had been driven close to the curb, and before she knew what they meant to do, grasped papa and forced him—almost carried him—into the hack, and then drove away. I knew from the description that one of them was Philip; but I could not make out who the other was."

"Asa Templeton," responded Thad.

"How do you know, sir?"

"I saw him in Philip's company when they left the train. But we must spend no more time in talking. There is work to be done. Mr. Bailey?"

Bailey stepped forward.

"How are you, my young friend?" grasping his hand. "Mr. Bailey, I want you to go to Police Headquarters and report this thing at once. Give a minute description of Philip Thornburg and Asa Templeton, and tell the chief that Thad Burr is behind this thing with as much money as he can cram into a street-car. I will remain here and see that they do not get aboard. And Miss Stowe, I want you to go to the nearest police-justice and procure a detention warrant for the two rascals and bring it to me. Now hurry, both of you!"

And away they went.

Thad took up his stand where he had a good view of the gangway, and waited.

An hour went by, and no one appeared.

Another half, and only wanted ten minutes to sailing time.

Belated passengers were hurrying aboard, baggage-men were swearing, and the black smoke was pouring out of the steamer's great funnels, and all the indications that the vessel was about to sail were there. But Philip and his pal with the old man were not.

The next minute Ada returned with the warrant, and out of breath. An instant later Bailey came, and informed the detective that all had been attended to as he had ordered it.

"You have both done well," observed Thad kindly. "You have accomplished something, while I have not."

"No signs of them yet?" asked Ada eagerly.

"No signs of them yet, and what is worse, I do not believe they intend taking passage on this steamer anyhow."

"Why not?" inquired Ada.

"Because it does not touch at either Southampton or Dover, and Philip's scheme will be to get your father on English soil as quickly as possible."

Ada paled.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Cannot you see?" cried Thad impatiently. "The fellow has the papers which I wanted your papa to sign, and he is going in for the property and the reward both. Your uncle, Asa, is an heir anyway, and they can compel your father to sign over his interest in the estate to Philip."

"The scoundrell!" hissed Bailey. "I wish I had let you kill him last night!"

"I had no notion of killing the rascal—I had given him about all I intended to when you interfered but I do not know but it would have been better for everybody if I had. But there she goes," he continued, pointing toward the steamer which had just hauled in her plank.

"What is to be done?" inquired Ada despondently.

"We will wait here a little while longer, and if we see nothing of them, we will go somewhere and consider what is best to be done."

"What is the use of waiting, now that the steamer is gone?"

"Philip may go out in a lighter and overhaul her. Knowing that we would be most likely to watch her, that would be the most natural thing for him to do. He will think that, as you did not find your father on board that you will not sail, and that by going out to her on the lighter he will give you the slip."

"But you said awhile ago that you did not believe he would sail on this vessel."

"Neither do I; still I may be mistaken. I see by the papers that there is no vessel which touches at any of the English ports going before day after to-morrow. He may wait for that, and he may go to New York and take a North German Lloyd from there."

The party lapsed into silence after that, and each appeared busy with his or her own thoughts.

Another hour went by.

"Well," observed Thad, "there is no use of waiting any longer. The steamer is outside the harbor long before now. I do not know but I made a mistake that I did not remain aboard until the pilot left her, and come back in that. The rascals may have given us the slip after all."

At that moment Thad noticed that Ada's eyes were fixed upon some object at some distance along the dock.

"What is it?" he asked.

The girl started at the sound of his voice.

She appeared unable to speak, but pointed mutely in the direction she was gazing.

Thad looked, and the sight which met his eye almost took him off his feet.

Philip, Thornburg and Asa Templeton had just alighted from a hack and were proceeding, with the old man between them toward a steam yacht which was lying alongside the dock.

Thad glanced significantly at Bailey, who had also seen the trio, and uttered the single word:

"Come!"

And dashed off at the top of his speed, closely followed by the young man.

They had gone but a short distance when they saw the party embark aboard the yacht.

Still, Thad believed he could reach her before she steamed out, and strained every nerve in the attempt.

But, as though they expected him, the party had no more than set foot upon the yacht's deck than she steamed away.

So quickly did she clear that by the time Thad reached the dock where she had been moored, the yacht was a length away.

Thad was perplexed.

In vain he gazed in every direction along the dock for a harbor patrol.

No one that could render him any assistance was to be seen.

For the first time since he had commenced on the case, he felt that all was lost.

No power on earth could now prevent Philip from landing his prisoner on English soil.

Thad was desperate, and with a woe-begone countenance, took the young man's arm and started to return to where they had left Ada standing on the dock.

Bailey was silent for the first few minutes of their walk, but finally he faltered:

"Do you think there is no hope of overhauling her, sir?"

Thad looked at him in surprise.

"Yes," he answered, dryly, "if you've got a rocket to ride—nothing else will do it."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ROCKET.

SCARCELY had Thad's last sentence escaped his lips; when both he and Bailey were startled by a loud, boisterous and discordant peal of laughter at their very side.

Thad was particularly startled because the laugh awoke an unpleasant recollection of something, he could not at the moment tell what.

But the instant he turned and beheld the author of the laugh, he understood why it had produced an unpleasant impression.

The author was none other than Augustus Merriman!

And to Thad's surprise Bailey grasped him by the hand and cried ecstatically:

"How are you, Gussie, old boy? I am delighted to see you! You are the person of all others whom we want to see! Is she here?"

This was a great surprise to Thad, especially the closing part of the sentence.

In the first place, he, for one, was sure that he did not want to see Merriman; and in the second, he could not imagine what Bailey had alluded to as "she."

Thad was about to pass on, not caring to speak or make himself known to the fellow (as he considered him), but was detained, first, by Merriman's reply, and later by Bailey's appeal to the detective.

"Yes," drawled Merriman, "she's alongside below here, and that's what caused me to laugh at the old gent's remark."

"That's so; her name is 'The Rocket,' isn't it, Mr. Burr?"

As stated, Thad paused and looked round, with anything but a pleased expression.

In the first place, he was not pleased that Bailey should have revealed his identity to Merriman; and in the second, he did not like it because Bailey had called him back in such a way that he was in honor bound to either recognize the man or snub him outright.

When he glanced at Merriman, that gentleman's countenance exhibited as much surprise as he himself had experienced at sight of him.

"This is a queer coincidence," pursued Bailey.

"You just remarked, Mr. Burr, that I would have to have a rocket to carry me if I wished to overhaul the yacht, and this friend of mine has a yacht called 'The Rocket' which has broken the record. What's her gait, Gus?"

"Twenty-six," replied Merriman, coolly.

"Then she's ours."

"Eh?"

"Let us get aboard and we'll explain afterward," ejaculated Bailey, enthusiastically.

"But where do you want to go?" asked Merriman, impatiently. "I haven't more than a ton of coal in the hold, and if you want to make much of a run, I've got to coal up."

"How much will you require to run her into Liverpool?"

Merriman looked at him in surprise.

"Eh?"

"I mean it. Hurry up. See you yacht suddenly away there?"

"The one with the yellow hull?"

"Yes."

"Well, what of her?"

"She's got three passengers aboard whom Mr. Burr and I would like to shake hands with."

"Who are they?"

"Philip, Ada and the old man."

"The devil?"

"And his partner. Well, what say you?"

"Why, I can be ready, coal, provisions and all, inside of an hour."

"Will that allow us to overhaul them this side of her Majesty's nearest port?"

"I can run that tub down, my boy, between here and New York Harbor, if she was going that way. I'm off. Be round in an hour. Mr. Burr, shake, and we'll fight it out afterward. No time for scrap now."

This last remark was evidently called forth by the scowl which Thad had been unable to clear from his brow, try as he would.

However, he forced a faint smile at the fellow's wit, and shook his hand cordially.

After which Merriman dashed away.

Thad and Bailey then resumed their walk to join Ada.

As they went along Thad said:

"Bailey, my boy, is that chap a friend of yours?"

"Yes, sir, and the best one I ever had—barring Ada!" he responded warmly.

"What sort of a chap is he?" for Thad could make nothing of it. He could not believe that this was the same man that he had had the dealings with.

"What kind? The best, most generous, most noble fellow in the universe! Why, he would sell the coat off his back to accommodate a friend."

Thad thought he must be dreaming.

He reflected for some moments, during which Bailey ran on with a string of eulogistic remarks about his friend; but the detective was too full of recollections of his own experience with Merriman to hear much of it. At length he asked:

"You say he owns a yacht, Bailey?"

"Yes; the fastest one that floats. Cost him a hundred thousand cold."

"He must be a man of wealth, then?"

"A couple of millions."

Thad was sure he was dreaming now.

Surely this was not the same man that borrowed two dollars of him, and went to a fifteen cent restaurant to dine!

But he said nothing about this to Bailey. He simply asked:

"Is he not a little eccentric at times?"

"There is where you hit it. He is the oddest stick that ever breathed. Why, I've seen him take off his hat and stand on the corner with the hat in his hand and his eyes shut until somebody would drop a penny in the hat, when he would astonish the good-hearted donor by flinging a handful of coin at him. Again I have known him to go to a cheap restaurant for a week at a time, ordering everything on the bill of fare, and pay for it; but never taste a mouthful."

"I cannot say that I admire his taste for amusement," responded Thad dryly, for he could not reconcile this kind of absurdity with anybody but a fool.

By this time they reached the place where they had left Ada, and they found her sitting upon a bale of goods, having got tired of standing.

She was pale and looked almost heartbroken.

"Cheer up, Ada!" cried Bailey enthusiastically. "There is still hope."

"But they got away on the yacht," she murmured in a broken voice.

"Yes, but we are going to follow them in a faster one—the fastest yacht on the water!"

"Whose is it, Herbert?" she asked eagerly, brightening up.

"Gus's."

Ada glanced at Thad, and in spite of her sadness, could not repress a smile.

"It seems I got a wrong impression of the young man," observed Thad.

"No, sir. It was the stars," smiled Ada.

"The stars told you wrong."

"The young man had more to do with it than the stars. Actions speak louder than words."

"Yes, they do then, and we shall soon see how loudly Gus's actions speak now. By the way, Ada, you are going with us, of course?"

"Certainly I could not be content to remain here and be in suspense all the time about what you were doing and how you were succeeding."

All three lapsed into silence for awhile, but finally Ada spoke.

"Things have taken a strange turn since you and I first met, Mr. Burr," she said.

"Yes, I was just this instant thinking of that, little girl," responded Thad. "And you have played me a lively game of wits, I must admit."

She laughed sadly.

"If I had been less witty and more intelligent we might have been saved this trip and a deal of other trouble."

"It was not intelligence, but confidence, you lacked, Miss Stowe. You were suspicious. You could not trust me. You could not believe that a detective can be above sordid gain, and I trust this experience may serve to teach you a lesson. Suppose I had become discouraged after the first encounter with your ruffians there at the house, as many would have done, where would you have been to-day?"

Ada colored violently.

"I wish to inform you now, Mr. Burr, that, while I was determined to stand between you and my poor father at the hazard of life, I had nothing to do with the ruffians who attacked you. That was Philip's work entirely. After our first interview and I had been compelled to give you our address or tell you a lie (I chose the former), I saw that I had made a mess of it. I was frightened and did not know what to do. In my dilemma I divulged my secret to Philip and asked his advice. I did not then know that he was the villain he is. I told him that you would probably call at the house to see papa, and he said for me to leave that to him; that he would impersonate papa, and make short work of you. Of course I thought that your whole scheme was to entrap papa and get him into trouble, and I knew that the very knowledge of a detective being on his track would completely upset his reason. The weight of his crime has so preyed upon him all these years that you can see he is almost an imbecile as it is."

"I do not blame you for the part you took in the matter, Miss Stowe. On the contrary, I cannot but commend your devotion and heroism. You are a daughter to be proud of."

"An adopted daughter," she corrected.

"How did you discover that fact?"

"Not through the fortune-teller entirely," she laughed.

"No?"

"No. I had the misfortune, or fortune to have a quarrel with Philip on the very day preceding the evening on which you called, and he had his revenge by telling me that I was only an adopted daughter. I did not believe it then; but he proved it to me."

"How?"

"Called upon papa to verify his statement. It nearly broke papa's heart to admit it; for that was one of the secrets which he was guarding as sacredly as he was that of his own mistake. But so completely was he in the power of this wretch, Philip, that he dared not say nay."

"Well, I am glad you have come to confide in me at last, little girl, and I trust that you will never regret having accepted me as a friend," said Thad, extending his hand.

She grasped it warmly.

"I know I shall not; my only regret shall be that I was too blind to accept you sooner."

"There is our yacht!" cried Bailey.

"So it is," replied Thad. "Your friend is prompter than he imagined he would be. It is scarcely more than half an hour since we left him. Come, let us get aboard."

The little party walked down to the dock where the little yacht had been moored, and was received by the smiling Merriman.

"And you, too, Miss Ada?" he cried, bounding forward to grasp the girl's hand.

"Yes, my boy, we could not sail without her," interposed the detective.

Merriman eyed Thad curiously.

He appeared unable to comprehend the radical change that had come over him in so short a time, for Thad's scowl had given place to his wonted benevolent smiles.

"Then you forgive me, Mr. Burr?" he finally said.

"With all my heart. But it was a scurvy trick, my boy, especially the story you told me about your connection with the robbery."

Merriman stared at him in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Told you about my connection with the robbery?" he gasped. "Great Scott! I thought that was Charlie Gay!"

"So I intended. But it was I, nevertheless."

"Well I am a big jackass! Why didn't you arrest me?"

"I preferred to wait and see whether you were telling the truth or not."

"And you found that I lied. I generally do. The boys call me the biggest liar going, but I am not, I am only a great big fool. Come, get aboard, folks. I've got grub and coal enough for ten days, and I can cross the Atlantic and return in that time."

The little party were not long in accepting the invitation, and in ten minutes more the little yacht was splitting the wave like a water-fowl, on her way toward the queen's dominions, or any other place where the fugitive bark was likely to go.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CHASE.

THE Rocket spun along at such a rate that it was soon outside of the harbor.

Then Merriman mounted the lookout and brought his marine glass to bear on the distant horizon.

Slowly and cautiously he swept the dark line where the sea and sky meet, as well as the intervening field of dark shimmering ocean.

The others watched him anxiously.

At length he shook his head, lowered his glass and descended.

"Not a ribbon of her in sight," he observed. "She must be doing some running too."

"What's the craft, captain?" asked the engineer, putting his head out of the little engine-room.

"The Crescent is the name of her. I don't know who she belongs to."

The engineer whistled.

"I know her like a book," he replied with a significant grunt.

"Well?"

"She's a clipper, sir."

"What's her record, Ruggles?"

"Twenty-four, sir, and she's never had a chance. My opinion is she can lay over it."

"Can she touch the Rocket?"

"Not with me at the throttle and Jim Fergusson at the Crescent's. He can't handle her."

"That is all we want to know," observed Merriman. "I say, Ruggles, she has an hour start of us. How long will it take the Rocket to run her down?"

The engineer reflected.

"Um. An hour. Twenty-two, at least, an' we're makin' twenty-six now. Well, sir, with anything like weather, we ought to tread on her heels in about four hours."

"Do it," said Thad, "and I will make you a present of a hundred dollars."

"And I will add another hundred," observed Ada enthusiastically.

"Now you know what to do, Ruggles," added Merriman.

"I'll make her do her prettiest, sir, reward or no reward."

"That's the way to talk it. If the thing can be done, he will do it," continued Merriman, turning to his friends.

An hour passed, and Merriman went upon the lookout again.

Again he swept every inch of space between the Rocket and the horizon, and again shook his head and descended.

"She's still over the bill," he observed wearily. "Well, we can do nothing but wait and leave it to the Rocket to solve the problem. In the mean time we will see what the cook his for us."

With that the party entered the little cabin where the cook had a magnificent little luncheon spread.

"This is not dinner, is it, Collins?" said Merriman.

"No, sir, this is only lunch. Dinner at seven."

"All right. This will do for lunch. Come, folks, sit around."

The party needed no second invitation.

Thad, Ada and Bailey, especially, had eaten nothing since breakfast, and were, accordingly, famished.

"This is royal, Merriman!" exclaimed Thad.

"Rather lays over the fare of the dug-out on Fourteenth street, where you saw Templeton and myself dining, eh?"

"I had not intended mentioning that episode," laughed the detective. "But, since you allude to it, I will say that it is—rather. By the way, how came you to patronize that horrible den?"

Merriman laughed uproariously.

"One of my idiosyncrasies. I'd been feeding Temp, for a month at Delmonico's, and the idea struck me that I would change his fare for a while and see whether he would stick to me or not. I gradually drifted down from Del's to something a little inferior, from that to something still worse, and so on, till I got him down to the animal den you saw us in."

"And he stuck?" queried Bailey, laughing.

"Stuck? Why, that fellow would stick to you if you dined him with the pigs. And the funniest thing of it all is, he never once complains. Appears as well contented with a ten-cent meal as a five-dollar one, as happy with Bowery beer as a bottle of Pommery at five dollars. His lone and sole mission in life is to avoid expense. He would starve with a pocketful of money rather than spend a cent of it. I have known him to stand on the corner waiting for me to take him to dinner for four hours in the rain and cold, when he knew that I would take him to the cheapest place in the city and he had plenty of money in his pocket and not a soul to spend it on except himself."

Thad laughed, as did all the party.

"I took a correct inventory of his character, at least," he said. "The first few minutes' conversation I had with him convinced me that he was one of those strange anomalies we sometimes meet, a compound of the vagrant and miser."

"That is exactly what he is," rejoined Merriman. "You have described him to a dot. And

yet he is one of the most interesting men I ever met. His conversation is a treat to any one with an ounce of intelligence—just my caliber. There is nothing he has not read and scarcely anywhere he has not been—and he never paid for anything or earned a dollar in his life."

"Sort of a Beau Brummel, eh?" observed Thad.

"Yes, without the Beau's tastes. Templeton has no tastes for anything unless it is money. He knows everything and appreciates nothing. He is as much pleased with a ragout of bull's meat as he is with a plate of terrapin; would as soon have a ten-cent chromo as a masterpiece of the greatest artist, and, while he reads and re-reads Homer and Virgil in the original, he wouldn't turn his hand over between them and Mother Goose or Deadwood Dick."

"So that they didn't cost anything eh, Gus?" interposed Bailey.

"So they didn't cost him anything."

"I presume he expects to make something out of this deal with Philip," observed Thad.

"No doubt," responded Merriman. "He is in for anything that will yield the mighty dollar without working for it."

"He may have to work for it in this case."

"I hope he may."

"Is it true," continued Thad, "that he gambles?"

"I do not think so," answered Merriman. "He is too stingy for that. Why, who ever accused him of that?"

"His brother, Mr. Stowe."

Ada laughed at this remark.

"Yes, that is one of papa's delusions," she explained. "Papa has given his brother a great deal of money at one time and another—in fact, supplied him regularly, and the more he gave him the more Asa wanted. So papa finally got into his head that his brother must gamble, a practice for which papa has the most inveterate aversion."

By this time the party had pretty well finished their luncheon.

"Well," broke in Merriman, at length, "I must go up and see what the prospects are for the morning, as well as see whether the runaway is in sight or not."

Everybody went on deck and Merriman mounted the lookout.

After surveying the ground again, he came down.

"Nothing in sight yet?" asked Ada, anxiously.

"Nothing," he replied, and the party could not help seeing that his brow was slightly clouded.

He looked at his watch thoughtfully.

"A quarter to six," he mused. "We have been out an hour and three quarters. We have but a little of an hour more of daylight. If we do not sight her by that time, there is little hope of it to-night."

"Begging your pardon, sir," interposed the engineer, "we have a moon to-night, and if them clouds over there," jerking his thumb toward the west, "don't get over atop of us—an' I don't think they will—we kin sight her six or seven leagues till three in the mornin' as well as now."

"Thank you, Ruggles, for the suggestion. I hadn't thought of the moon being at the full. Hope is with us yet, folks."

The weather was perfect, and the sea was like polished mirror.

The little craft seemed to glide through the water as though there was nothing in the way.

The party sat down on deck-stools to enjoy the balmy breeze, which had not yet grown too chill for comfort, and for the next hour chatted merrily, the men enjoying a good cigar.

At length Merriman consulted his watch again.

The sun was just sinking into the sea.

"Ten minutes to seven," said he. "Let us see whether we have made any progress or not."

He took his glass and went upon the lookout. He scanned the horizon long and carefully.

Not a speck of the darkening expanse was left unexamined.

At length he lowered his glass and came down on deck.

This time the engineer appeared to be the most anxious one of the party.

"What away now, cap'n?" he asked eagerly.

Merriman shook his head gloomily.

"Nothing but the topsails of a liner."

"Nothing else, sir?"

"Not a spar."

The engineer looked glum.

"It's funny," he growled. "We've been in her wake for near three hours, an' if she's on this course, we ought to sight her by now. Don't ye think it possible that she might 'a' went some other way, sir?"

"It is possible; but hardly likely. No, she's cutting surf faster than we figured on, Ruggles."

Ruggles shook his head reflectively.

"It can't be that they've got some other chap at the throttle, I reckon?"

"Such a thing is possible, Ruggles. Can you screw the Rocket up to anything better?"

"Not a turn, sir. She's walkin' now."

Merriman turned away with a sigh.

"I hope the engineer's conjecture is not correct," observed Thad.

"I hope so, too," returned Merriman, mournfully. "Still, there is a chance of it."

"In that case our run will be for nothing," suggested Ada.

"Possibly not," rejoined Thad. "I have an idea. If we do not overhaul them, I suggest that we go on to Liverpool, where I will have a warrant issued for Thornburg, and have the authorities notified in every portion of the Queen's dominion, so that he will be arrested as soon as he lands."

"That is a good idea," observed Bailey. "That will give us a chance to get at him before he turns his prisoner over, maybe."

At this moment the cook announced dinner, and the party went below.

The dinner party was not a particularly cheerful one. Every one was more or less depressed and conversation lagged.

Merriman had left a watch on the lookout when he went below, and just as the party were finishing their dinner, they were startled by a wild shout aloft.

All rushed on deck to see what was the matter.

"There she is, sir!" cried the watchman, enthusiastically.

Merriman was up in an instant.

"Yes, it is she," he said, after a peep through the glass.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STORM.

EVERYBODY in turn had to mount the lookout and have a sight of the fugitive yacht.

There was a general jubilee.

The engineer was the first to come up.

It was with unconcealed pride that he took the glass and scanned the horizon.

"That's her, sure," he said almost gleefully. "I knowed she couldn't keep off much longer if she was on this course."

"How far is she off?" asked Ada eagerly.

"'Bout seven league, I reckon," rejoined the engineer.

"That's twenty-one miles, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, miss."

"How long will it take us to overtake her?"

"That depends. If she keeps up her present gait, it'll take us summers about three or four hour. Ye see we've been about that long sightin' her, an' she still has about as much wind between her an' us as we thought she ought to have at the start."

"At that rate," interposed Bailey, "it will be in the neighborhood of midnight before we overhaul her."

"Just about," admitted Merriman. "But if this moon stays with us we can easily keep her in sight."

"There will be a lively deal when we do overtake her," remarked Bailey.

"Of short duration, though," put in the detective. "There are three of us, all good fighters, I take it, against two. We will make short work of them."

"Yes, that part of it will be easy enough," said Merriman. "The only fighter aboard is Templeton. Philip is the most arrant coward I ever met."

"And will Templeton fight?" inquired Thad.

"That is one of his few excellencies. He is as brave as a lion, and will fight on the wrong side as well as on the right. It makes no difference to him just so that he can fight. And he is the truest shot with a pistol I ever met."

"In that case we had better be in good trim before we run upon them. You are all armed, I presume, gentlemen."

"There is an arsenal back there," observed Merriman, nodding his head in the direction of the cabin.

"You had better fetch them out and let us overhaul them," suggested the detective.

"They are in perfect trim, detective. But I will do as you say, as we may need them up here anyway."

With that he went aft and soon returned with an armful of revolvers and carbines.

"First installment," he said, throwing them down on deck.

He then returned to the cabin, and soon again returned with another armful of weapons. This time they were mostly Winchester repeating rifles.

"Those will come in handy at long range," he remarked.

Thad took up the arms one piece at a time and examined them critically by the light of the beacon.

When he had completed the list, he remarked: "Excellent order, and as fine a lot of firearms as I ever looked at. Now, let us get to work and load them. We may not need them; but there is nothing like being prepared."

When the loading commenced, Thad noticed that Ada took as active a part in it as the rest.

"What, little girl," he smiled, "do you understand the use of firearms?"

"Well," ejaculated Bailey. "I would hate to wager much that she can't beat any man on the yacht shooting."

"Bravo!" cried Thad. "You grow in my

estimation every hour, little girl. 'Yesterday-I simply thought you were a witty little chit; but to-day I find you are a heroine and a marks-woman.'

"I can shoot a little," admitted the girl, blushing.

"I should rather say so!" exclaimed Bailey. "She beat Templeton three shots out of five!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the detective. "Now, where is your champion shot, Merriman?"

"I give in," laughed the young man. "If she can beat the champion I have nothing more to say."

The next half-hour or so was devoted to loading the firearms, and little conversation was indulged in.

When everything was in order the little party went down into the cabin to escape the cold air, leaving a man at the lookout.

Another hour went by, and Merriman went on deck.

"What's away?" he asked.

"Slowly creeping on to her, sir," responded the watchman.

"When do you think we will run her down?"

"Two to two and a half-hours more ought to do it, sir, if," and the watchman cast his eye (fl toward the west, "if that cloud don't get around in the way."

"What does it look like, Powers?"

"It looks as though it might have a capful of wind in it; but it may go round."

"I hope it will." But as Merriman surveyed the darkening west, his countenance fell. "We'll get it as sure as shooting, Powers," he said.

"I wouldn't surprise me if we did, sir."

By this time Thad and Bailey came out.

"What prospects, my boy?" asked the detective.

"We're gaining upon her slowly," responded Merriman. "But there's an ugly-looking sky over there."

"What, you don't think we're going to have a storm, do you?"

"I am afraid so."

"That's unfortunate."

"Yes, especially at this particular time and place."

"How so?"

"We will pass a group of very rocky and dangerous islands pretty soon, and if the squall should come on just as we were in the midst of them, it might make it unpleasant for us."

Bailey and Ada (who had arrived on deck by this time) turned pale and looked at each other apprehensively.

"Do you really think there is danger of a shipwreck?" gasped the girl.

"I cannot even conjecture, Miss Ada," rejoined Merriman. "But if she comes, all we can do is to be brave and not borrow trouble in advance. You are the last one from whom I should expect a note of fear."

Ada blushed half indignantly at the implication.

"I have no fear, sir—for myself," she retorted rather sharply. "But there are others whose safety I am solicitous of."

And she cast a significant glance toward the retreating vessel which bore the man she called father.

"Brave little girl!" cried Thad grasping her hand. "I know we shall have no cause to complain of you."

Then followed a cheery little spell of chat, which, however, was soon brought to an abrupt termination by an ominous rumbling off in the west.

All glanced in the direction, and then at each other.

"She's coming, folks," observed Merriman.

"An ugly lookin' sky that, sir," interposed Ruggles, coming up at that moment. "Shouldn't wonder if we'd have some weather in a few minutes."

"It's a pity too," remarked the watchman, "for we're gaining on the other yacht rapidly. She isn't more than two leagues off at this minute. Another fifteen minutes run will bring us alongside."

"Is that so?" exclaimed everybody in a breath.

"She must be a-slackin' off," observed the engineer.

"That's natural enough," rejoined the watchman.

"Her wheelman probably knows what he's in danger of if he runs in among those reefs during a blow."

Meantime the sky was gradually becoming overcast, vivid flashes of lightning lit up the heavens and a stiff wind was howling.

In a few minutes the sea was rolling mountains high, tossing the little craft about as though it had been a chip.

The spray swept over the deck at such a rate as to render it impossible to remain there without being drenched, and everybody except Merriman and the watch went below.

It soon grew so dark that nothing but the signals could be seen of the other yacht.

Merriman's wheelman was an old salt—the only one on board—and knew the channel like a book, but even he looked a little glum at the prospects.

"I've gone through here in all kinds of weather," he remarked, in response to a question

from Merriman, "and never met with an accident; but never with a craft like this. You can't hold a mere chip like this anywhere. She jumps from under you like a cork."

The storm was now raging at its worst.

The little craft would be one instant balanced on the top of a mountain-high roller and the next minute engulfed in the vortex.

Merriman consulted the engineer.

"Don't you think we'd better slacken off and not get too close to the reefs till the storm lulls?" he asked.

"Too late now," replied the engineer. "We're in the thick of 'em. The only thing's to get as far past as possible."

Merriman went below to see how his party was weathering it.

To his surprise they appeared as well contented as though they had been on dry land, although it was impossible to talk or do anything else but hold on to something to prevent themselves from going onto their heads.

"It will soon be over, won't it, Mr. Merriman?" asked Ada hopefully.

"Yes, it will soon be over now," he answered reassuringly.

And that moment a lurch hurled the party in a pile in one of the cabins.

All hands preserved silence after that.

Although they tried to look unconcerned there was not a face among them that did not exhibit traces of apprehension.

Merriman did not remain among them, but made his way with difficulty to the reeling deck.

The storm seemed to have increased in violence.

The waves washed across the deck so that he was drenched before he had been there a minute.

"How is she, Williams?" he asked of the wheelman.

"Just passing the third light," he rejoined.

"If I can hold her off for five minutes longer we're safe."

Just then a horrified shout came from the watch.

Merriman dragged himself on deck again.

"What away," he called.

"Didn't you hear that crash, sir?"

"No. What was it?"

"I can only guess, sir. The Crescent's signal lights are out."

"My God!"

"Gone on a reef, I reckon."

"Where was she?"

"Two points on our port and only a mile away."

Merriman was horrified.

He did not dare to tell the news to the party in the cabin, and stood clinging to the rail to keep himself from being washed overboard, afraid to go below lest they should ask him to tell the truth.

He returned to the wheelman's cab.

The wheelman was pale and a little nervous.

Mistaking the cause, a thrill of apprehension went through the young captain.

"What now?" he asked.

"Our run is over," answered the wheelman.

"What do you mean?"

"The Crescent is dark. We are past the danger ourselves, and as soon as the storm subsides we had better round to and see if we can't pick them up—if it isn't too late."

"You think there is no doubt that she went on the reef, eh?"

"Not the least. I could see that she was going into it when she began to bear off port awhile ago."

Merriman went below and reported that the danger was past, which had the effect of cheering the party up, but said nothing about the accident.

The storm had about spent itself and soon began to lull.

The little party became cheerful and chatted freely, all except Merriman.

The others noticed his glumness and rallied him on it.

"You were the brightest when the storm was raging and we were in danger of our lives," remarked Ada, laughingly; "and now when the danger is passed you are glum as a funeral."

Merriman made no response, but he thought that a funeral would probably be the result of the storm—if they could find the late crew of the wrecked Crescent.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DELUSION.

As soon as word was given to the engineer what had happened he slackened speed, and just allowed his screws to revolve fast enough to keep the craft trim.

The storm had now subsided and the sea gone down, and, at Merriman's solicitation, Ada and Bailey turned in for a few hours of much needed rest.

Thad would not hear of retiring, however, and as soon as the others were safely stowed in their respective hammocks, he went on deck with Merriman.

"What was it that happened last night?" he asked.

Merriman looked at him in surprise.

"What do you mean?" he inquired, trying to look innocent.

"Oh, you needn't try to keep it from me, my boy. I evinced no concern at the time for fear the others should become apprehensive; but I knew that something had occurred as soon as you came down."

"The fugitives went on to the rock," rejoined Merriman in an impressive voice.

Thad turned pale.

"You do not know, of course, with what result?"

"No. It is supposed, though, that they must have gone to pieces. It could not have been otherwise. The point they struck is the most dangerous along the coast."

"What do you propose doing?"

"Go back as soon as it is light enough. We are merely creeping now in order not to get too far away."

"That is terrible! I hope all are not lost."

"That is all we can do now. It will be day-break in another hour, and then we will veer about and go back."

The two men then lapsed into silence.

Lighting a cigar and giving Merriman one, the detective seated himself on the capstan and peered gloomily out into the darkness and listened to the roar and swish of the waves.

An hour passed, and Merriman told the wheelman to veer about.

When she was well on the return course, and the engineer had put her under way again, Merriman roused up his other engineer and let him take the throttle.

"I wanted you to run this course, Ruggles," he said, "because I knew you could give her more speed than any man living. That is the reason I did not relieve you during the night."

"That's all right, sir," responded Ruggles, cheerily. "And if it's all the same to you, I'd feel more contented to run her back to them islands again myself."

"Just as you like."

And Ruggles went to his engine again.

It was the same with the wheelman. After apologizing for leaving him at the wheel all night, Merriman offered to relieve him, but he preferred to handle the tiller in that dangerous region.

All this while Ada and Bailey had been in blissful ignorance of what had been going forward.

About an hour after daylight they arose and came on deck.

By this time the rocky islands were in sight again.

"Any sign of the other yacht this morning?" was Ada's first question.

"Not yet, my dear," answered Thad; but we hope to sight her very soon."

"I do hope nothing happened to poor papa during the storm last night."

"So we all hope," Merriman hastened to say, lest some one would reveal to the girl the true state of things.

The morning had dawned beautifully and there was every prospect of a glorious day.

Ada and Bailey were cheerful—being in ignorance of the facts—and the others pretended to be.

The little yacht plowed along at a good speed and an hour later had rounded into the narrow channel where the accident had happened.

A few floating spars and fragments of the wrecked yacht were all that was to be seen.

Ada looked curiously at the fragments and glanced at Merriman.

Strive as he would his face told the story.

Ada turned livid.

"Tell me truly," she begged, "was there an accident to the other yacht last night?"

Thad approached her and taking her hand, said:

"You can be brave and calm, little girl. We shall soon see whether anybody was hurt or not."

The girl made no reply, but she cast a tearful eye toward the bits of wreck dancing in the sunlight of the morning and sighed.

The wheelman found a safe place to anchor and ran into it, while the engineer reversed his engines and the little yacht came to a standstill.

As soon as the anchor was dropped a boat was lowered and the three men and Ada went ashore.

The island consisted of a huge mass of barren rock without a sprig of vegetation to be seen from the point on which they landed.

For a long time they could find no traces of the fugitives.

They reconnoitered the coast for some distance, and began to fear that the crew had perished.

A shelving rock extended back from the beach some fifty feet and from that arose a perpendicular wall some fifty feet high.

To all appearances this wall hammed in the coast the entire circuit of the island, and it was too steep to be scaled by any human.

However, our friends followed the winding course of the ledge for half a mile or so and began to conclude that they had about made the circuit of the island, when they at last came to an opening in the cliff, and they saw that the

interior of the wall consisted of a fertile patch of ground comprising several acres and covered with vegetation.

This led them to wonder if the island was not inhabited, but as no houses appeared, they concluded that it was not.

When they had passed through the narrow opening or gate into the fertile interior of the island our friends paused to survey the scene.

Grass, bushes and wild flowers grew in profusion, and at one end of the inclosure was a clump of trees.

"This is a delightful spot," exclaimed Ada. "It is a wonder no one lives here."

"It would be just the spot for us, Ada," observed Bailey.

She gave him a look that effectually closed his mouth.

It indicated as plainly as words that she did not wish to speak on the subject implied in his remark until she had found her father.

While this was going on Thad had been looking off in the direction of the clump of trees.

At length he said:

"If I am not very much mistaken that is a smoke over there among those trees."

Merriman had his glass with him and raised it to his eye.

"You are right, detective," he rejoined, after scanning it for a moment. "It is a camp-fire."

"Then we will visit it."

"Yes, that we will," interposed Bailey.

The other two men glanced at Ada.

"Oh, you needn't look at me," she smiled. "I am going too."

The party had not neglected to arm themselves before leaving the yacht, and even Ada had a couple of dangerous-looking pistols swung to her side.

A few minutes' walk brought them into the grove, and a few more to the camp-fire.

They paused some distance from the fire to reconnoiter; but as they saw no one they ventured closer.

Although the fire had evidently been recently lighted, no person was to be seen in any direction.

"This is strange," observed Thad.

But scarcely were the words out of his mouth when the sharp report of a rifle was heard and at the same instant Thad's hat flew off.

The three men looked in the direction from which the report had come and saw a man in the act of dodging into the door of a cave.

"Rather a close call," remarked the detective coolly.

The rest of the party did not take it so calmly. They exchanged apprehensive glances and turned very pale.

But none appeared to have sufficient firmness to speak.

Thad saw their consternation, and came to their relief.

"It's nothing," he observed lightly. "A miss is as good as a mile; and the fellow has done us the kindness to let us know that he is here, which we might not have known otherwise."

This had the effect of reassuring the rest somewhat, although it was easily seen that they were still a little nervous.

Strange to say, Ada appeared the least affected by the occurrence, and kept her eye fixed earnestly on the mouth of the cave where the man had disappeared.

She looked as though she contemplated following the mysterious individual.

Thad noticed the peculiarly earnest expression in her face.

"You were not thinking of going after him, were you, little girl?" he said.

The girl started as though just awakened from a dream.

Glancing quickly at the questioner, she responded in a low calm tone:

"I would like to follow him, if such a thing were possible."

"But it is not possible—or rather not practicable," rejoined the detective.

"Who do you imagine the fellow was?" interposed Merriman, who had regained his wonted calm by this time.

"I have not the slightest idea," replied Thad.

"I have an idea," put in Bailey.

"Who?"

"Asa Templeton."

"Come to think of it, he did resemble old Temp," said Merriman; "although I must confess that I was a little too much rattled at the moment to recognize him."

"We were all in the same boat about that time," observed Bailey.

"Except Ada," suggested the detective. "She appeared as cool as a cucumber. But this won't do. We must make a move."

"What do you suggest?" asked Merriman.

"The first thing to be done is to reconnoiter a little and ascertain, if possible, whether this cave has another outlet. I suggest that Ada and Bailey remain here and keep a sharp watch on the mouth we see here, while Merriman and I go round and see whether the cave has an opening on the outside of this wall."

"That is a good idea," remarked Merriman.

"And if we find such a thing it will be simple enough to guard both of them."

"That is the plan," rejoined Thad. "Whether

there is but one opening or two, we can guard them or it, and it will be simply a matter of time when they—of course, I presume they are all in there—will be starved out."

At this suggestion Ada turned deadly pale.

"Poor papa!" she murmured in barely audible accents.

The others interpreted her meaning.

It had not occurred to Thad until that moment that in starving out Philip and Templeton they would also starve the old man.

The detective hastened to reassure her.

"Don't be alarmed, little girl," he said. "It is not at all likely that these men will be foolish enough to allow themselves to be starved before surrendering. As soon as they find themselves hemmed in on both sides they will be ready to make terms."

"You mean try to fight their way out, don't you?"

"Possibly so; but more likely they will attempt to compromise—agree to surrender your father in lieu of their own liberty. That is all we want, you know, my dear girl."

"And the papers," supplemented Ada.

"Certainly, the papers, little girl. We must also include them in any treaty. But let us go, Merriman, my boy."

With that the detective shouldered his gun and started along the base of the wall, followed by Merriman.

Thad did not go back to the gap where the party had entered, hoping to find another nearer by.

He found that the island was much larger than he had first calculated upon.

After a walk of considerably over half a mile he saw that the inclosure encompassed by the wall extended at least a mile further, and that the island at this portion was rocky and barren.

"We would have done better, perhaps, to have gone to the other gap in the first place," observed the detective at length. "Still, as we have come this far, we may as well go further and see what we can discover."

"Yes, we are liable to find a break any minute," rejoined Merriman.

The young man's words were prophetic.

They were scarcely more than uttered when our friends came to—not a gap in the rock exactly as the other one had been, but a sort of tunnel through which a view of the sea burst upon them.

"Here we are!" ejaculated Thad rapturously. "You're something of a prophet, my boy."

The wall, although quite as high, appeared to be much thinner at this point.

Indeed, it was not more than a dozen yards wide at the base, so that it was the work of but a moment to step through and find themselves again on the ledge hemming the coast.

"There is not much room here for a cave," observed Merriman as they passed through.

"What I was thinking myself," rejoined the detective; "and that gives mean idea. Probably what we took for a cave was nothing of the kind after all, but merely a winding passage through the wall."

Merriman did not reply.

He was gazing at some object some distance along the coast.

Thad, following the direction with his own eyes, saw that the object which was attracting the young captain's attention was his own yacht, the Rocket, which was dancing on the waves a hundred or so feet from the shore and about a hundred yards further along the coast. But what interested the detective most was the sight of a boat—Merriman's own yawl—containing six persons and shooting out from the shore toward the yacht.

"A peep through his glass told Merriman that three of the men were Philip Thornburg, Asa Templeton and the old gentleman!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNEXPECTED MISFORTUNE.

THE two men were so astonished at the sight that neither was able to move or utter a word for a few seconds.

Merriman mutely passed the glass to Thad and the latter took a peep through it, although this was unnecessary, as his naked eyes had already told him who the occupants of the boat were.

Merriman glanced inquiringly at the detective.

The latter appeared to read the question his companion's look seemed to ask, for he said:

"They intend taking possession of the yacht, my boy."

"What is to be done?" inquired the young man nervously.

"Prevent them from doing it, if possible."

And, without another word both men started simultaneously upon a run toward the spot where they had left their yawl tied.

Although at the rapid pace at which they ran the short distance to be traversed was soon covered, the men in the boat had gained the side of the yacht almost as soon as our friends did the shore.

Having reached the side of the yacht the man in the bow of the boat proceeded to make her fast to the yacht.

"Stop!" yelled Thad, at the same time raising

his carbine and leveling it upon one of the crew.

This caused all on board the yawl to turn and look back.

By this time Merriman had one of the number covered with his carbine.

This appeared to cause some consternation among the men, and a hasty consultation ensued.

Whatever the nature of the consultation was, it ended in a few seconds, and the crew appeared to be acting upon the decision arrived at, for they all prepared to leave the yawl as quickly as possible.

"Stop!" yelled Thad again. "Stop this instant and bring that boat ashore or I shall make fish-bait of some of you in about a second!"

The threat appeared to have no other effect than to make them hasten all the more.

Thad saw that they had no notion of obeying his command.

Something definite must be done and at once. Every second now was valuable.

He therefore wasted no more words on the fugitives, but murmured in a low, firm voice:

"Pick your man, my boy, and let him have it."

Scarcely were the words out of the detective's mouth when the almost simultaneous crack of the two rifles broke upon the air.

The next instant a crash of firearms arose from the yawl and three or four bullets whistled past the heads of our friends.

Fortunately no harm was done, and the cloud of smoke created by the two volleys prevented Thad from seeing the effect of his own and Merriman's shots.

And then, by the time the smoke cleared away the yawl's crew had got aboard the yacht.

Our friends looked at each other in dismay.

Neither appeared to have courage enough to speak for some seconds.

Finally Merriman made out to falter:

"What's to be done, sir?"

Being appealed to, Thad aroused himself from his stupefaction and pulled himself together.

Still, the problem was too great for even him. He shook his head dubiously.

"It looks as though the jigger was up with us, my boy," he observed, in tones the nearest approaching despondency of anything anybody had ever heard from him. "I see no way of overtaking them now. They have got it all their own way."

"It cannot be possible that old Ruggles will allow himself to be bulldozed into opening a throttle for those chaps," groaned Merriman, sadly.

"Notwithstanding, he or some one else is doing it. See?"

As Thad spoke the young captain of the Rocket was horrified to behold a sight that froze his blood.

The screws of his precious craft began to revolve, the anchor to be lifted from the water and the craft to back away out of the slip into which she had run her nose.

The young man turned as white as a ghost.

"I never could have believed it," he murmured. "But it is too true, and I shall never see my little darling again!"

Thad glanced at his companion and saw a tear sparkling in his eye.

"Don't lose courage, old fellow," he cried, encouragingly. "All may not be lost yet."

"What is there to hope for, now? Here are we on a deserted island with not the sign of a hull of any description on which to escape, and so far as we know, not a mouthful to eat."

"I admit that the situation does have a grave aspect just now, my boy; still, it will do no good to despair. Something is sure to turn up in our favor."

The young man shook his head sadly, and made no reply.

For several minutes thereafter the two men stood watching the little yacht as it dropped out of the channel, veered about and put out into the open sea.

All this time the crew had managed to keep themselves out of sight, so that Thad and his companion had no opportunity of firing upon them, if they had so desired.

When the yacht was almost out of sight, Thad turned to Merriman and said:

"Well, my boy, we are checkmated for the present, but we must not lose our courage. Shall we go back to our friends?"

"I do not know that we dare after what has happened."

"It will be a difficult thing to break the news to them."

"It will, indeed. What shall we say to them?"

"Tell them the truth at once. There is no good in keeping anything back. They are both plucky enough to stand it."

Without another word, the two men retraced their steps to the nearest opening through the wall, and in another half hour were with Ada and Bailey.

"Well, did you discover another outlet?" were Ada's first words.

"Not exactly, my girl," responded the detective; "but we discovered what was its equivalent."

"What was that?" inquired the girl and her companion in a breath.

"Sit down and promise to be cool and sensible, as you always are, and I will tell you the whole story."

The party seated themselves upon the grass and Thad related all that had occurred since he and Merriman had left.

At the conclusion of the recital, to everybody's surprise, Ada burst out laughing.

"So we are four Robinson Crusoes on our desert island," she observed.

"So it seems," rejoined the detective.

"And the worst of it is," put in Bailey, "there doesn't appear to be any food supply, such as the famous Crusoe found waiting for him."

"Not even a goat," remarked Ada.

"A dog would satisfy me at present," said Merriman.

Ada sprang to her feet.

"I have an idea!" she cried.

"Well," Thad said.

"I am going to explore the cave," she declared.

"What for?"

"It may be that they left something to eat in there."

"Not very likely. Shipwrecked mariners are not in the habit of carrying provisions around with them."

"What did they have the fire for?" she queried.

"To warm themselves and dry their clothes, of course."

The girl's countenance fell.

But only for an instant.

The next moment it brightened up as with an inspiration.

"You infer, then, that their clothes were very wet when they got ashore?" she observed.

"Undoubtedly."

"Real reeking, dripping wet?"

"Sopping, soaking wet," smiled the detective, wondering what that keen little miss was coming at.

"Wet as a drowned rat," drawled Merriman.

"Very well," continued Ada. "Now, how did they manage to make a fire? Who carried the matches and kept them dry in their wet clothes? Tell me that."

"There is an idea," responded Thad, a little surprised at her perception.

"Still," he added, after some reflection, "there may be a thousand ways of accounting for the fire, none of which argue that the wrecked crew of the Crescent brought any provisions ashore with them."

"Nevertheless, I am going to explore this cave," persisted Ada.

With that she put her head in at the mouth of the cave.

"Uhl but it's dark in there!" she cried.

The three men laughed.

"I thought you would back out, when it came to the pinch," laughed Merriman banteringly.

She could not stand that, and darted into the cave at once.

The others followed her, Thad in the lead.

As the detective had half expected, the so-called cave proved to be nothing more than a winding sort of a tunnel through the rocky wall, its winding course accounting for the extreme darkness at the mouth.

The ceiling was very low so that the party were compelled to stoop for the greater part of the journey.

The wall was more than a hundred feet thick at this point, and took our friends a good while to make the passage, which they did in profound silence.

The first one to break the silence was Ada.

Upon reaching the outer mouth of the tunnel she gave vent to an exclamation that caused the others to start.

"Glory!" she cried.

"What is it?"

And her companions crowded up behind her to see what had caused the exclamation.

But not until they had crowded her out of the mouth of the tunnel and all stood in the open air, did they realize what it was.

And they all felt inclined to exclaim "Glory!" or something akin to it.

The sight that met their gaze almost took them off their feet.

There, right before them, high and dry on the rocks, sat the wrecked Crescent.

The height of the sea the previous night, together with a high tide, had lifted her onto a rock several feet above the present tide, and while she was badly wrecked, there seemed a bare possibility that her lockers might have escaped.

The sight filled our friends with new hope, and they soon made their way to the wrecked yacht and climbed aboard of her.

Thad and his friends were not long in exploring the little yacht, and were delighted to find that, although she was a total wreck and could never be rendered seaworthy again, her lockers, which were above decks, appeared to be intact.

Without a word, Thad snatched an ax from where it hung on the wall, and with a few well-aimed blows, succeeded in demolishing the lid of the locker.

Everybody hastened to peep in.

They were delighted to find, not only that it was well-stored with the choicest provisions, but that the locker was zinc-lined so that the contents had received no damage from seawater.

There was a general jubilee.

Even Ada forgot her grief at the probable fate of her foster father for the time being, and joined in the general good humor.

The provisions were removed to the shore and carried through the tunnel to the grove where the fire was still smoldering.

Wood was procured and the fire replenished, after which Ada showed her ability in the art of cookery by broiling some ham and frying eggs in a frying-pan brought away from the wrecked yacht.

This, together with canned fruits, pickles, cheese and other dainties which the locker had yielded, furnished the half-famished party with a sumptuous breakfast.

"Talk of Robin Crusoe's luck," cried Merriman, "this beats it all hollow!"

"Especially in the matter of the cook," supplemented Thad. "There is where we have a decided advantage over the old fellow."

Ada blushed.

"Hunger is an excellent sauce," she observed, "and the best assistant the bad cook can wish for."

"What!" cried Thad, with affected indignation. "Do you dare to disparage our cook? Her equal does not exist, and I will leave it to my young friend Bailey."

Bailey colored almost as much as Ada had, but he made out to stammer something to the effect that Thad was right in his estimate of Ada's cooking.

The meal passed off pleasantly, and everybody felt in a better humor afterward.

"Now," suggested the detective, "I hope it may not be so, but the chances are that we will be compelled to remain here for some time, and in my opinion, we had better see what we can find in the Crescent in the way of bedding."

The bare suggestion caused all to turn pale. Ada especially took on an expression of grave apprehension.

"Poor papa!" she sighed. "I wonder what has become of him."

None dared attempt an answer to the inquiry.

All seemed to be thinking the same thing.

And that was that the old man would soon be on English soil and in the hands of the English law officers.

Thad was the only one equal to the occasion, and even he could offer no suggestion which carried any great amount of consolation with it.

"We can only hope for the best, my dear girl," he said.

"But there is no longer any hope," she sobbed.

"Yes, I think there is still some hope."

"What is it?" eagerly.

"Who knows but Providence may favor us? There might be such a thing as another shipwreck—"

"In which case, papa," she interposed, "might—"

"Have as good a chance of being saved as he had before," Thad hastened to assure her.

Meanwhile the party busied themselves in removing the hammocks from the wrecked yacht.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORE BAD LUCK.

ALTHOUGH Thad did not admit his apprehensions to Ada or any of the others, it was quite evident that the detective had about abandoned all hope of carrying out his original plans.

That the fellow Philip would now succeed in landing the old man upon British soil and turning him over to the authorities there seemed not the shadow of a doubt.

He was embarked on the fleetest vessel that swam the waves and there appeared to be nothing to hinder him from carrying out his infamous scheme.

On the other hand, Thad was stranded high and dry upon a desert island without a keel to take him anywhere.

The situation was certainly not cheerful.

However, he made a show of hopefulness and even cheerfulness for the sake of his younger and less experienced companions, and went about cracking jokes and assisting in the removing of the bedding of the wrecked craft to the grove.

When this task was completed, boards were torn up from the deck of the yacht, the ends sharpened and driven into the ground, over which was stretched the yacht's tarpaulin.

This formed a very comfortable tent and insured the little party against the inclemency of the weather, at least.

"Well," observed Thad, "we are all right as long as our grub holds out, anyway."

"And then what?" gasped Bailey, who appeared to have a holy horror of dying from starvation.

"Oh, long before that occurs," said the detective, reassuringly, "we will sight a sail."

"Do you think so?"

"I am almost certain of it. This is very nearly in the course of the regular Southampton

liners, one or two of which pass each way every week."

"As for myself," remarked Merriman, "if those rascals would bring my little beauty back so that I could leave here and come back when I chose, I wouldn't mind taking up my residence here."

"It is a beautiful place," declared Ada.

"Yes, and I should judge that the climate was pretty uniform," added the detective.

"It is a wonder that no one lives here," said Ada.

"Suppose we come here and settle," suggested Bailey, timidly.

The girl looked at him, shrugged her shoulders and smiled, but did not answer in words.

"If you do I shall certainly insist upon coming to see you once in a while," laughed Thad.

Ada blushed.

"So you shall, Mr. Burr—when we settle here."

"Which you would like to have me interpret to mean that you will never settle anywhere. Never mind, young lady, you are pretty cunning, but you cannot fool the old man on matters of that kind."

She blushed again and grew confused and silent.

It was growing late in the afternoon by this time and Thad proposed to Merriman that they take a stroll and explore the island a little farther.

"It may be that the island is inhabited after all," suggested the detective; "and if it is we want to know it."

"That is true," agreed the young captain, "especially if the inhabitants happen to be pirates, which they are just as apt to be as anything else."

"And a little apter."

The two men strolled off toward the tunnel, leaving the lovers to themselves, but when they glanced back a few moments later they found that Ada and Bailey were following them.

However, the latter kept a respectful distance behind, as they doubtless had matters to talk over which they did not care to have the others hear.

"I guess there is little doubt, my boy," observed Thad, as they strolled along, "that that is a match."

"No doubt of it, I think," admitted Merriman. "And I am very glad to see it. Ada is a good girl and Bailey is a good fellow and will make her a good husband."

"And yet I thought that you would have something to say in the matter at one time."

"I?"

"I am going to tell you something, Merriman, and I do not want you to become offended."

"Certainly not. You cannot offend me."

"Do you remember one day not very long ago of going into a restaurant on Fourteenth street, near Avenue A, in company with Asa Templeton?"

"A beanery of the lowest order?"

"Yes."

"I do."

"Do you remember of noticing a tough-looking individual coming in and taking a seat at a table not far from where you sat?"

"It seems to me that I do, although it is not quite clear to me. Why?"

"Nothing, except that that individual was your humble servant," smiled Thad.

Merriman stared at him in surprise.

"You don't say?"

"It is true."

"Then, I suppose you overheard a conversation between us?"

"I did."

"Let me see," mused the young man, "what were we talking about? Do you remember?"

"I certainly do. That is what I wanted to speak to you about. You were talking about what appeared to be a prospective fortune. Templeton spoke as though he thought you had plenty of money, and you hinted that you had not, but might have, some time, in the event of succeeding in marrying some young lady whose name I did not catch. Now, tell me, first, what was your object in affecting poverty, and second, if the young lady in question was not Ada."

Merriman burst out in a hearty laugh.

"To answer your questions in the order in which they were put, my object in assuming that I was a poor man or a pauper rather, was to prevent that fellow from continually borrowing money of me. If he had known that I had ten, twenty or fifty dollars in my pocket at the very moment I was gloating over having borrowed two dollars from you, he would never have given me a moment's rest until I gave him at least half of it. I have plenty and do not mind spending it freely and even giving it to a worthy friend, but I do dislike being played upon by a professional cheat. The young lady in question—or supposed to be in question rather—was in reality none other than Ada. As a matter of fact I never had any more thought of attempting to win her than you have this instant. I have another one in view. Ada is an excellent girl, and would, I have no doubt, suit me admirably; but there were two reasons for my not attempt-

ing it. The first is, that I am betrothed to another young lady of whom I think a great deal, and then the second is, that I knew my friend Bailey was madly in love with Ada and that she reciprocated his affection."

"How came you to speak of the matter as you did, then?"

"To please Asa. He had proposed some time before that I should marry Ada, get hold of the old man's fortune and divide with him."

"Just like his rascally scheming. But tell me. If you remember, he made the remark on that occasion that if she ever married anybody, it would be you—that, in fact, Ada had avowed as much. Do you imagine she ever said anything of the kind?"

"Probably not. It was, in all probability, one of Temp's lies. However, if she ever did make use of any such language, it was in jest, or for the purpose of putting him off. She certainly never meant it, for I never spoke to her on the subject of love in my life."

By this time the men had strolled outside of the rocky wall and followed the ledge along the sea-front for some distance.

At length they came to where the ledge suddenly broke off and was succeeded by a stretch of beautiful sandy beach.

"This is a relief," cried Thad. "We can bathe here."

And the suggestion caused him to look back to see if Ada and Bailey were still following them, but the couple were no longer in sight.

Thad thought little of it, and as his attention, as well as that of Merriman, was attracted to quite another object that moment, neither of them gave the other people any thought at the time.

The object which attracted their attention was a long row-boat which, as our friends gazed, was shooting out from the shore of the island on which they were, and apparently making for another group of small islands a half a league or so away.

Merriman raised his glass to his eyes and took a long look at the mysterious boatmen, and then handed the instrument to Thad with the remark:

"If those four chaps aren't pirates they had better take in their sign."

In the mean time the detective took a careful survey of the boatmen also.

"They are a tough-looking set," he observed, as he lowered the glass. "I wonder what they have been doing over here."

"That is hard to tell. Maybe they live somewhere further around the curve there. We haven't explored more than half this island yet, you must remember."

"That is true enough, and you may be right. It is quite likely that they may live on the island, and if so we may have occasion to use fire-arms before to-morrow morning."

While Thad was speaking, Merriman was taking another survey of the receding craft.

"I say!" he suddenly exclaimed, "did you notice a woman in the stern of the boat?"

"No," rejoined Thad, snatching the glass again.

"By Jove! there is a woman there!" he finally ejaculated, after examining the craft for some moments.

"It can't be that it is—"

"No, certainly not," interrupted the detective, "although I was half inclined to think the same thing at first."

Neither one had mentioned the name, but each one understood the other to mean Ada.

And each strove to drive the notion from his head, and fancy it to be preposterous.

Nevertheless the idea continued to haunt both and caper them a good deal of uneasiness.

Finally Thad resumed:

"The only reason I thought of such a thing was the fact of the woman in the boat being dressed something like—"

Thad paused, apparently unable to pronounce the name.

"The same thing occurred to me," rejoined Merriman. "You don't often see these people living in such an out-of-the-way place as this dressed as well as this woman is. Still, she may be some visitor from the city."

"I hope it may be so," sighed the detective.

The two men walked on in silence for some time.

At length they reached a point on the coast from which they could see the first gap in the stone wall through which they had passed on coming upon the island that morning, showing that they had made a complete circuit of the island.

"Well," remarked the detective, pausing, "we have gone around the entire island, and there is no sign of hamlet or habitation. I think we had better go back and look for Ada and Bailey."

"I think we had; although I have no doubt they are all right."

"Neither have I, although I will feel more comfortable when we are all together."

"So will I. I have no doubt that Bailey can take care of Ada as well as any other man. Still, with four such ruffians as those in the boat it would be better to have three guards than one."

"You are right, my boy, and—"

"Who is this coming?" cried Merriman breathlessly.

"By Jove! it's Bailey," gasped Thad.

"And alone!"

"Something has certainly gone wrong!"

Before either had time to make any further comment Bailey dashed up to them white and breathless.

"Where is Ada?" demanded Thad before the young man could recover enough breath to speak.

"There!" he gasped, pointing toward the receding boat.

"My God!" cried the detective. "How did it happen?"

It was some moments before Bailey could speak, but he finally recovered sufficiently to describe the incident.

"When you got a little way ahead of us—almost out of sight—we noticed another tunnel through the wall, similar to the one we came out through, and Ada proposed that we should go through it, cut across to this other gap and head you off. She thought it would be such a surprise to you.

"We passed through the tunnel, and got about half-way across the point of the island, when we had to pass some jagged rocks that arose several feet above the ground, and just as we were about passing them four men sprang out in front of us.

"Before I had time to use my gun one of them dealt me a blow over the head with a club that knocked me senseless.

"I was unconscious for a short time only, I should judge, but when I came to, the men were gone and so was Ada."

At this point the young man broke down and wept like a child.

"It is too bad," said Thad in a soothing voice. "But do not despair, my boy. There is still hope."

"How can there be any hope?" cried Bailey desperately, "when we have no boat to follow the wretches?"

This was a poser for the detective, but he was soon equal to the occasion.

"They can have but one object in carrying the girl off," he observed, "and that is to obtain a ransom, and the moment they get her in a safe place they will return and make us a proposition."

"Do you think so?" cried the young man eagerly.

"I do."

"They can have all that I've got—which isn't much," rejoined Bailey.

"Well, old fellow," interposed Merriman, "if you haven't enough, perhaps I have—if they will trust me until we get back to New York, or write there, and I'm very sure that all I have is at your disposal, if it is needed to regain poor little Ada."

"Thank you, old fellow," cried Bailey, grasping his friend by the hand. "You always were the best friend in the world; but I never half appreciated you until now."

"Don't mention it, my friend; only cheer up and hope for the best."

The three men mutually started back toward their camp in silence, neither being able to suggest anything under the circumstances.

At length Thad broke the silence.

"This, upon the whole, appears to be our unlucky day," he observed. "I do not think I ever met with as many misfortunes in one day."

"It's all my fault," cried Merriman, mournfully.

"How so?" demanded Thad in surprise.

"I'm a Jonah. I knew that as soon as my little beauty was stolen, other bad luck would follow us."

Thad could hardly suppress a smile at this unexpected exhibition of superstition in a man from whom he would least expect it.

However, he saw that the young man was too serious to be rallied upon his whim, and the three passed on in silence.

When they reached the camp our friends sat down to talk over the best mode of procedure.

But, although the subject was discussed in all its phases, no conclusion could be arrived at, from the fact that there was no means of leaving the island.

At length night came on, and still they sat there, nobody dreaming of sleep.

Half the night had dragged on, when at length Thad suggested that they make another tour of the island.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

THAD'S companions were only too anxious for something which would furnish diversion from the tedium of sitting by the lonely camp-fire, the companions of their own thoughts.

So, when Thad proposed the second expedition around the island, both young men sprang to their feet at once, eager for the trip.

At Thad's suggestion, all hands examined their fire-arms before setting out, that they might be prepared for any emergency.

When this was done, and all was found to be in proper order, the three started on their tour.

Our friends passed out by way of the tunnel which they had at first mistaken for a cave, and

which brought them within a few hundred feet of where the wrecked yacht lay.

The night was clear and the moon shone so brilliantly that an object could be discerned at a long distance.

No sooner were they outside the rocky wall than a sight met their gaze that caused them to pause.

Four men—presumably the same ones our friends had seen in the row-boat that afternoon—were busily engaged in plundering the wrecked yacht of whatever of value there was left in her.

As soon as the detective's eyes fell upon the rascals he drew his companions back into the tunnel to prevent the possibility of discovery, and then whispered:

"The abductors of Ada, and I'll bet a thousand! Now, I have an idea. They must have a boat somewhere along the coast—possibly not far from where they are at work. My plan is for us to glide along in the shadow of the wall until we espy the boat and then make a quick but cautious move and take possession of it."

"Then what?" gasped the others.

"Why, when we are in possession of their boat we will have them just where they now have us. They cannot escape from the island and will be only too anxious to make terms with us."

"Good idea!" assented both young men rapturously.

Without another word the three men glided softly out of the tunnel again and, after pausing to make sure that they were not discovered, proceeded to move with noiseless footsteps along the wall, keeping well within the shadow.

Our friends had gone perhaps a hundred yards when they came to an abrupt curve or inlet in the coast.

And here, in a sort of slip just large enough to receive her lay the row-boat, half concealed in shadow.

To abandon the shadow of the wall and dash swiftly but noiselessly to the moored craft was but the work of an instant.

Fortune seemed to favor them in every way, for the vessel was not only not locked, but the owners had carelessly left the oars inside.

Our friends untied the painter-line, pushed the boat off and sprang in.

They lost no time in pulling away some hundred yards from the shore, but directly off the point where the wrecked yacht lay.

As they expected and desired, the pirates espied them before they had gone very far, and general consternation followed.

The rascals with one accord rushed down to the water's edge and gazed after the fugitives with horror and indignation.

It was some seconds before they could recover their voices, however, but when they did, they began to yell lustily after our friends.

The latter paid no attention to them until they were at what they deemed a safe distance away, and then, at Thad's suggestion, they slackened oar and the detective quietly asked:

"Well, my friends, what can we do for you?"

"Fetch back that thar boat!" was the indignant command.

"Which we will not," responded Thad in his quiet voice.

"Ef yer don't we'll—"

"What?" laughed the detective defiantly.

"Shoot!" yelled the frantic watermen.

"Blaze away," said Thad coolly.

They were nonplused.

They saw that idle threats were useless, and they realized the folly of attempting to do anything like efficient execution with firearms at that distance.

A hurried consultation followed.

Finally one of the party demanded in a calmer voice:

"Say, what do you fellers want, anyway?"

"Your boat," answered Thad tantalizingly.

"But we want her. How're we ter git offen hiar?"

"That doesn't concern us in the least."

Here another consultation ensued.

At its conclusion one of the party spoke up again:

"Say, if yer fellers wants ter go anywheres we'll pull yer, ef ye'll fetch back the boat."

"Oh, as to that, we can pull ourselves," rejoined the detective. "We have the boat and are ever so much obliged to you for your kind offer, but we won't disturb you. Go on with your work. Good-evening."

And Thad pretended as though he were about to resume the use of his oars.

"Don't take our boat!" yelled one of the men frantically.

"Why not?" asked Thad.

"We want to git off."

"O. Where do you want to go?"

"Home."

"Where do you live?"

They did not answer at once, but after some moments one of them responded in a cowed voice:

"On thet thar nearest island yer see yander."

Thad considered that he had them at a point of despair at which they would listen to a proposition, and he said:

"You are the same chaps that abducted a young lady from this island this afternoon, are you not?"

"What?"

"I say, you are the same fellows that stole a girl from here this afternoon."

They were silent a moment, and then one of them responded in a sheepish tone:

"No, sir, it wasn't us, it was—"

"There is no use of lying," interposed the detective. "We are dead on to you! Come, I'll tell what we will do with you: We will let one of your number come aboard and go with us to the other island after the girl, and when she is safely landed here again we will release your boat. Otherwise we will leave you here and go in search of her ourselves."

They appeared unable to make a reply to this proposition for a long time.

Finally, after a long consultation, one of them said:

"Agreed, we'll do it."

There was a suspicious ring in the voice that Thad did not like.

It indicated that they had hatched up some scheme by which to take advantage of our friends.

Thad's impression was that they intended to allow the boat to land and then all rush down upon its occupants and overwhelm them with their superior numbers.

But he was too old a strategist to be caught in any such trap.

"Remember," interposed the detective, "that but one is to come aboard, and the rest of you must remain at a distance of not less than one hundred yards from where we land. We shall be prepared for you, and the first man—except the one who is to accompany us—who attempts to approach will be shot down like a dog!"

This appeared to strike terror to the ruffians, for there was a ring of earnestness in the detective's voice which they could not help but understand.

It was some moments thereafter before they replied to the latter proposition, during which they engaged in another long and animated consultation.

At length they appeared to have made up their minds to accept the inevitable, for one of the parties spoke:

"All right, we'll do as you say."

There was a submissiveness in the voice this time that satisfied the detective, and he ordered his companions to pull back toward the shore.

Thad sat in the bow with a cocked rifle, determined to bring down the first man that attempted violence.

According to agreement, one of the number came down to the water's edge as the boat approached the shore, while the other three remained some distance away.

Thad kept a sharp eye upon the three, but the boat reached the shore and took the single boatman aboard without the others making any attempt at getting aboard or committing any violence.

Notwithstanding their apparent peaceful attitude, the detective did not cease his vigilance, and as soon as the fellow was safely aboard, ordered the boat pushed off, and his companions pulled for all they were worth till the boat was a hundred yards or more off-shore.

He then ordered them to yield the oars to the regular boatman, and the latter took his seat at the rowlocks.

"Now, sir," commanded Thad in a stern voice, "see how quickly you can put us across that neck of water to where the girl is; and mind, if I detect any signs of treachery on your part, you are a dead man!"

The fellow grunted and scowled, but bent at his oars and sent the frail craft flying through the water.

As has been already stated, the distance between the two islands was only a mile and a half, and it did not take the burly waterman long to pull the boat over.

"Now," said Thad, when the boat was made fast and all were ashore, "you boys remain here and keep watch of the boat, and I will accompany this man and fetch Ada."

This was agreed to, and the boatman led off in gloomy silence in the direction of what appeared to be a cluster of small cabins in the distance.

No words passed between Thad and his conductor, but the detective kept a close watch upon him.

A rapid walk of fifteen or twenty minutes brought them to one of the cabins, and the man paused in front of it and growled:

"You wait here, an' I'll go in an' git her."

"That is not necessary," returned the detective. "I will go with you."

Whether the fellow had intended to play him any trick or not, it was evident that he did not relish the detective's stubborn determination to allow him no opportunity to take an advantage.

However, he saw that he could do nothing else but submit, and so with a growl of dissatisfaction, the ruffian approached the door of the hut.

The place was all dark, but Thad could see by the moonlight that it contained but one room

and that it was constructed from fragments of wrecked boats.

The fellow opened the door without the ceremony of knocking or the trouble of using a key, and stepped inside.

Thad was close upon his heels.

It was so dark inside that nothing could be seen, and Thad, placing his back against the door, ordered the man to strike a light forthwith.

Instead of doing so, however, the fellow addressed some one in the darkness.

"Where's the gal, Poll?" he asked in his rough, grunting voice.

"Eh?" cried the voice of a woman, as though just awakened from a deep sleep.

And then Thad heard another female voice, which appeared to be that of an older and coarser woman.

"Lay still!" it commanded. "Don't yer dare ter speak ag'in er I'll choke yer!"

"Dry up!" growled the man in front of Thad. "I axed yer ef the gal was thar! D'ye hear?"

"Yas, she's hiar, what—"

"Wal, thay're arter her. Fetch her out!"

"Did yer git the mon—"

"Shet up, I tell yer! Fetch the gal out, an' ax no more questions er I may hev ter do some chokin'!"

"Strike a light!" commanded the detective sternly.

"Who's that?" cried the woman, in evident alarm.

"Never mind. You fetch the gal out!"

"And I command you to strike a light!" roared Thad, clutching the ruffian by the throat with one hand and pushing his pistol under his nose with the other.

"I will, I will!" cried the fellow, and almost instantly a light was burning, the woman having made it, however.

As soon as the candle threw its sickly glow about the single room, Thad glanced about him, and there upon a rude bed of straw lay Ada clad in a dress of rags and her hands and feet bound with ropes.

Pointing his pistol at the woman—whom he now saw to be a half-breed Indian—Thad commanded her to unbind Ada in a little less than no time and to restore her own clothes, or he would bore a hole through her.

It did not take long for the woman to obey both orders.

All this time Ada had been gazing wonderingly at the detective as though unable to recognize him, but finally she did, and threw her arms about his neck.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN SELF-DEFENSE.

THAD, fearing that the enemy might take advantage of his helplessness while the girl was embracing him, as well as desiring to get back to his friends as soon as possible, gently disengaged her arms from about his neck.

"Pardon me, my dear girl," he whispered; "but we must not linger here a moment longer."

"I understand," she responded, in the same undertone; "but I was so overjoyed at seeing you after despairing of ever seeing any of you again that I couldn't help it. You have been such a friend to me."

"Yes, yes," whispered the detective, impatiently, "but let us go now."

And they immediately left the cabin, with the half-breed wife of the boatman gazing savagely after them.

As soon as they were outside Thad made the fellow take the lead again, and thus they made their way back to the boat.

Merriman and Bailey were still on guard, and were overjoyed to see Thad and Ada, especially the latter. Indeed, it was all Thad could do to prevent a love scene between Bailey and Ada, but he succeeded by admonishing them that there was no time for such a thing then.

So all the party embarked and the burly boatman sat down at the oars.

He was still glum and silent, but he pulled with a vim that pleased our friends.

So well did he pull, in fact, that half an hour later the little craft was approaching the other island.

"Now, boys, be on the alert for treachery," whispered the detective, as they neared the inlet. "This is their last chance, and I shall be surprised if they do not take advantage of it."

Accordingly each one kept his weapon in his hand and cocked, and in readiness for the first emergency.

Sure enough, as they had expected, the boat had no more than run her nose up into the inlet than the remaining three ruffians suddenly sprang out of some hiding-place and bounded down the ledge toward our friends.

But they had no sooner done so than our three friends jumped ashore and leveled their carbines at the ruffians.

"Halt!" yelled the detective, in a voice of thunder.

The men stopped and quailed before the dangerous row of shining barrels.

"Drop your weapons and throw up your hands!" commanded Thad.

The men obeyed doggedly.

"Now get back—away from here!" he ordered.

The ruffians retreated a short distance, but Thad noticed that they kept glancing back at something, and finally when they had gone a hundred feet or so, they stopped and began to laugh.

Instinctively our friends glanced around at the boat, when to their horror they saw that it was some two hundred feet from the shore and the boatman pulling with all his strength.

Thad was about to command him to halt when the sharp report of a rifle at his side caused him to pause.

As soon as the smoke cleared away they saw that Merriman's carbine had done its work, for the boatman had plunged forward upon the bottom of the boat.

Thad did not allow the circumstance to divert his attention from the three ruffians on shore very long, and giving the order for Bailey to look after Ada, he and Merriman turned their attention to the others again.

Thad found his late enemies in a state of consternation over the fate of their comrade, and it required little to quell them now.

In the mean time the heroic little Ada had grasped the oars from the fallen man's hands and soon put the boat's nose into the inlet again.

As soon as the boat was landed the girl sprang ashore and was caught in her lover's embrace. When the lovers came up the ledge to where the detective and Merriman were, Thad addressed himself to the three wretches in front of him.

"Now, men, get into that boat as quickly as the Almighty will let you!" he commanded, "and do not dare to return to this island for the next week, under penalty of the same fate as that of your comrade there. Go!"

They needed no second orders.

In half the time that it takes to record it, every man was aboard, and in three minutes more they were far off toward the other island.

"They will not molest us again to-night, I am satisfied," observed the detective. "Let us get back to our camp and get a little rest."

"We certainly need it," remarked Bailey; "particularly you and Merriman, who did not retire at all last night, and here it is approaching another day."

The little party returned to the camp in remarkably good spirits, considering all that they had gone through during that eventful day.

Ada prepared a cold lunch, as all were famished by this time, and made a pot of delicious coffee.

"Another evidence of her skill, my boy," observed Thad, glancing across at Bailey as they sat about the improvised table.

Bailey blushed scarlet and was silent.

"And to think we came so near losing her," added Merriman.

"Yes," put in Thad. "I say, my boy, you must take better care of her than that, or I shall never allow you to take her for keeps."

"Not a word," interposed Ada, who was also crimson. "Herbert did all that any man could have done against such odds. He is brave and I won't hear him criticised!"

"Bravo, little girl!" cried Thad. "There is a woman for you! But, my dear girl, you must not quarrel with your old friend for perpetrating a few poor jokes. We have been too good friends for that."

"Indeed we have, Mr. Burr," she cried, extending her hand, "and you must not think that because I take up for Herbert I am quarreling with you. Indeed, I am too grateful to you and to Mr. Merriman for the noble work of to-night not to love you both with all the love I have—"

"To spare from Herbert," laughed Thad. "That is right. Keep a good share for him."

"And while you are speaking of the brave work of to-night, Ada," interpolated Merriman, "do not leave Herbert out. He has done as much as the rest of us."

"So I am more than willing to believe," confessed the girl.

At her friends' solicitation, Ada then recited, as the little meal progressed, her experiences while a prisoner with the ruffians.

As had been surmised, it was the intention of these people to keep her for a handsome ransom, which she soon learned from the questions they put to her regarding her own and the wealth of her friends.

"And my best of friends here, Ada," observed Bailey, almost too full for speech, "what do you suppose he proposed?"

"Who, Mr. Merriman?"

"Yes."

"I don't know—get you another girl?"

"No, the noble fellow put all his fortune at my disposal to ransom you!"

"The dear, good boy! Here is my hand, Gus," she cried passionately, "and never forget that Ada is your best friend."

"I certainly shall not," he returned warmly, "and I am proud of the possession of such a friend."

Thus the little supper proceeded and was finished, after which all hands retired.

"We need have no fear now, I think," ventured the detective. "Our enemies from the other island are not likely to molest us, and I will sleep with one eye open anyway."

Whether he fulfilled his promise or not, he certainly slept soundly, as did all the others, and did not awake until long after the sun was high in the heavens.

Whether he would have awoke then even is questionable, had it not been for an unforeseen incident.

He suddenly awoke with the realization that somebody had pulled the tarpaulin aside and entered the tent.

Thad grasped his revolver and was upon his feet in an instant and came face to face with—Ruggles, the engineer of the Rocket!

He could scarcely credit his senses.

"What does this mean?" he cried in dismay.

The engineer laughed good-naturedly. "It's a trick o' mine," he rejoined. "Ye see, I made out that thar was another terrible storm a-brewin', an' finally got them chaps so skeered that they decided to put back. Me an' the wheelman kept on a-talkin' 'bout imaginary clouds and black squalls an' all thet, till we hed 'em blamed nigh crazy."

"But their crew, did not they know better?"

"Their crew? Bless yer soul, sir, we managed to git them three chaps as full as ticks afore we'd gone five league."

"And where are they now?"

"The crew is in the hold with the hatches fastened down and the other three chaps are somewhere on this island."

"Good! Go back to your yacht, Ruggles, and I will rouse up the boys and make a search for these parties."

Ruggles obeyed and Thad soon had his young friends, including Ada, aroused, related to them what had happened, and the whole party set out in search of the late fugitives.

Scarcely had they started when Thad noticed the mouth of what appeared to be a cave not more than a hundred feet from their camp, but after calling attention to it in a casual way, the party started on again; but hardly had they done so when the whirr of a bullet sung past Thad's ear, and the three men turned in time to see a man attempting to dodge back into the cave—if such the opening happened to be; and at that instant they saw him throw up his hands and reel back to the earth.

At the same time they had heard the ring of a pistol at their very side, and looking round, beheld Ada standing there with a smoking revolver in her hand and her keen eye fixed upon the prostrate man whom she had just felled.

Not a word passed between any of the party.

After the first surprise all three ran to the fallen man and turned him over on his back.

It was Asa Templeton!

He was not dead but evidently badly wounded.

He was partially unconscious, and Thad, after stanching the flow of blood as well as he could, poured some brandy down the man's throat.

This soon had the effect of reviving him and he opened his eyes.

The first face that met his was that of Merriman.

"Why, Gus, old boy," he murmured feebly, "was it you that fixed me like this?"

"No, Templeton, old man. It was a better shot than I am."

"Who?"

"Ada."

"Oh, Lord! Served me right. I taugth her to shoot."

"Where are the others?" demanded the detective impatiently.

"Who?" he asked feebly.

"Philip and the old mar."

"In there," he muttered, pointing toward the mouth of the cave.

"It is going to be dangerous work going in there," said Bailey.

"I have no fear," responded Merriman, and made for the mouth of the cave.

"Fool!" cried Thad, pulling him back. "Do you want to put your head into the lion's mouth?"

"No, I just want to go in and pull it out by the ear," laughed Merriman.

"Wait a moment," admonished the detective. Then turning to the wounded man. "How large is that cave?"

"Small. Not more than twenty feet square, a mere dug-out."

Thad went to the fire, and taking a brand poured something out of a bottle upon it.

The next instant every one of the party was holding his nose.

It was the vilest smelling stuff in creation.

Going to the mouth of the earth chamber he threw the brand inside.

An instant later it came flying out; but Thad immediately threw it back again.

This was repeated a half a dozen times, and the cave was getting fuller and fuller of the noisome smoke.

Then, suddenly, something dodged past the detective so quickly that he did not realize what it was, but a glance at the flying figure convinced him that it was the old man.

And while his head was turned to look at the fugitive another figure flew past him.

This one also went too quickly to be scrutinized, but it did not get far.

When Thad looked in the direction it had gone he beheld Bailey standing in front of the fugitive with a drawn revolver.

He then saw it was Philip.

The two men glared at each other and not a word passed between them.

But there was a vast difference between them.

Bailey was cool and collected and looked his enemy straight in the eye, while Philip cringed and scowled and looked as though he would like to stab his opponent and run.

He held a knife half concealed in one hand and appeared to be watching an opportunity to use it.

This state of affairs might have continued a minute.

The other two men lost all interest in the wounded man and came to watch the impending duel.

It could easily be seen that Philip was growing more nervous every instant.

Finally he began to back away from Bailey and the latter to follow him up.

This continued for another minute.

Then all of a sudden Philip made a feint as if to run.

This threw Bailey off his guard, and before he realized what the other was about to do, Philip sprung at him with his knife and aimed a deadly blow at Bailey's heart.

But the young man was too quick for him and sprung to one side in time to escape the thrust.

This appeared to infuriate Philip and he rushed upon Bailey like a mad bull. There was but one thing for Bailey to do, and that was to retreat backward.

This he did for some distance, but the other crowded him so close that he was compelled to fire in self-defense.

Philip threw up his hands and reeled to the earth.

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS—INNOCENT.

No one could have looked more horrified than did Bailey when he saw what he had done.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "I have killed him!"

"Never mind," said Thad reassuringly. "It was plainly in self-defense."

At that moment Ada came up and took his hand.

"You did perfectly right, Herbert," she said, consolingly. "He intended to kill you, and only for your bravery he would have done it."

He put his arm tenderly about the girl and kissed her.

It was evidently the first time he had ever taken this liberty, for she blushed crimson; but she was not offended and looked tenderly up into his eyes.

In the mean time Thad had turned Philip over and examined his wound.

The man was unconscious.

"I guess you have done the work for him," observed the detective.

"Is he dead?" gasped Bailey.

"Not quite; but his hours on earth will not be many. I must revive him if possible, and see if he has anything to say."

With that Thad chafed his hands and poured a few drops of brandy down his throat.

At length Philip opened his eyes and stared wildly about him.

"Where am I?" he murmured faintly.

"My man, if you have anything to say, you had better be quick about it, for your time here is short," admonished the detective.

Philip stared at him for several seconds without speaking.

"Who are you?" he finally asked.

"I am the detective whom you tried to murder night before last in Newport."

"Great Heaven! And you are still alive?"

"Yes, but that is more than you will be very long. So, if you have anything to say, you had better hurry."

"Am I really going to die?" he groaned.

"There is no doubt of it."

He was silent for some minutes, meanwhile kept staring wildly about him.

"Yes, yes," he finally faltered. "I am going to die. I feel it. I am growing weaker every minute."

"Have you anything to tell before you go?"

He stared up inquiringly into Thad's face.

"Eh?" he murmured absently, as though his mind were already beginning to wander.

"You have a confession to make, haven't you?" repeated Thad.

"Confession? confession?" he muttered, as though unable to comprehend the meaning of the word.

"Yes, confession. Have not you been guilty of some crime which you would like to rid your mind of before you meet your Maker?"

This appeared to terrify the fellow.

"Yes, yes!" he stammered almost inarticulately. "I have a confession to make. Is Ada here?"

"Yes, she is here."

"Let her sit near me so that she may hear all I have to say."

Ada sat down near the dying man, and he took her hand in his already clammy one.

"Ada, can you forgive me before I die?" he began.

"Yes," she murmured in a low voice.

"Ada, I am your father," he went on.

The girl started.

"Don't start. That is nothing to what I have yet to divulge. You know I told you the other day that Stowe was not your father. I did not intend to do that so soon, but I should have told you sooner or later. If I had succeeded in this scheme I intended to tell you, and also tell you that you were my daughter. It was for you that I craved all this money. I desired to make a lady of you, such as Stowe was able to do. It maddened me to think that I was not able to take you back and give you all that he could, and that is what drove me to this crime."

He was silent a few moments, and seemed to be writhing in pain.

"Ada," finally he resumed. "I have been a very bad man. I have committed a great many crimes. But the worst of them all was the one which I committed against the poor old man whom you have known so long as your true father."

"Listen, Ada. Twenty-one years ago I married the sister of Stowe's wife. Her brother, John Shelton, did not like either myself or Stowe—or to call him by his right name—Templeton. We frequently quarreled, and once or twice came to blows. One day John and I had a dispute and it ended in a fight between us, in which I was considerably worsted. I determined from that moment to kill him."

"Well, a few days afterward I saw him going across a field toward Stowe's house and I followed him."

"When I reached the house I heard him and Stowe talking in an out-house. I peered in and saw that they were quarreling and on the point of fighting."

"At length John struck at Stowe and the two clinched."

"Stowe had been making something and still held the knife in his hand. He had no intention of striking John with it, I am sure, but somehow during the scuffle the knife came in contact with his breast and cut him slightly, not enough to do any damage, but the pain and the sight of the blood caused John, who was as timid as a girl about such things, to faint."

"Templeton thought he had killed him and ran for help, leaving the wounded man alone. He had scarcely gone when John came to and got up, but he never left the shop alive. The next instant I was upon him, and picking up the knife which Templeton had dropped, I stabbed John to the heart, and then fled."

"Templeton soon returned with several others, and, of course, found John dead, and the natural supposition was that he had murdered him. He himself thought so, and still thinks so to this day. But, he is not the murderer, he is not the murderer. It was—I—I—uh—"

Thad raised the dying man's head and again chafed his palms and poured brandy down his throat.

He finally revived a little and continued:

"Templeton left the country and came to the United States. He left his wife and the boy behind, and when he finally wrote for them it was I who answered the letter telling him that his wife refused to join him. I did this because I hated Templeton the same as I hated John Shelton. It was I who persuaded his wife to refuse to live with him again. It was I who induced her to put her boy away from her when she came to this country, so that Templeton might not find her through the child."

"His wife came to America and changed her name to Watson, and her son was adopted by a man by the name of Bailey."

"Bailey?" interrupted Ada.

"Yes, my child, Herbert Bailey is your foster-father's son, and Mrs. Watson of Fifteenth street is his mother and Templeton's wife."

"And now, my daughter, I have but one request to make of you—or rather two. Bring this family together. Undo the fiendish work of your wicked father, if you can, and marry Herbert. He is a good boy, and has been the means of righting all this great wrong, for he—he—killed—me—"

Again the man became too weak to speak and soon became unconscious.

Thad did all he could to revive him, but to no purpose.

He uttered a few groans and then came the inevitable death-rattle, and the poor wretch who had caused so many unhappy lives and had been the most unhappy of them all, passed over the dark river.

Ada bent down over the wretched man and wept for some time as though he had been the kindest of fathers.

Finally Bailey lifted her from the ground and took her in his arms.

"Are you willing to fulfill his wishes, darling?" he asked tenderly.

"You know I am, Herbert," she answered.

And he sealed the vow with a kiss.

It now occurred to the detective to look after the wounded man, but when he went to look for him he was not in the place he had left him.

"Looking for me?" he heard a voice say.

He glanced in the direction, and saw that Asa was standing near the dead man.

"Why, I thought you were dead," exclaimed the detective.

"Not I!" rejoined Asa; "but I'm all-fired hungry. Haven't you folks anything to eat?"

"We have something down on the yacht, not here," replied Thad.

"Good gracious! When are you going back there?"

"Pretty soon, I guess. For since you mention it, it occurs to me that none of us has had any breakfast, and I for one am as hungry as a bear."

"Where's Merriman?" asked Bailey.

"Here I am!" answered the young man in person.

Everybody glanced in the direction and there stood Merriman, holding the old man by the arm, the latter looking as though he were nearly frightened to death.

"I've had a devil of a run after this old duck," he explained. "He is as crazy as a hare and thinks I am a detective. Maybe somebody else can talk to him."

Thad approached him.

"How do you do, my friend?" he said in a kindly voice.

The old man stared wildly at him and tried to run, but Merriman held him.

"I don't know you!" the old man protested.

"Yes, you do," responded Thad kindly. "I am your dear friend, the one you met on the beach yesterday."

"No, no, no," he cried in terror. "You are a detective and want to take me back to England. Philip said so. We know you. Go away! I do not want to see you!"

"My dear old friend, I am not a detective. Philip lied. It is he who wants to take you back. Besides, you never committed the murder. It was Philip himself. He says so."

The old man looked puzzled.

"Philip says so?"

"Yes. It was his dying confession. You are an innocent man and are free to resume your right name and go where you please."

The old man appeared dazed, it all seemed a dream to him.

Ada approached him and put her arm about his neck.

"It is true papa," she affirmed. "See, Philip, who killed John Shelton, is dead. And he confessed before he died that he did the killing, and, darling papa, here is your son," she went on, leading up Herbert.

"Yes, papa," assured Herbert, "I am the long-lost son, and we shall see mamma very soon."

The poor old man looked in a bewildered manner from one to the other, as though he thought there was a conspiracy among them.

Then he walked over and looked at Philip.

"Poor Philip!" he moaned. "He's dead. He won't keep me from smoking any more. Poor Philip!"

Again Thad approached him and taking out a cigar, offered it to him.

"Let's you and I have a smoke, old friend," he said.

The old man glanced back at the dead man, smiled, and took the cigar.

"He can't keep me and my good friend from smoking now, eh?" mumbled the old man.

"No, indeed. But, let us go back to the boat and get some breakfast. We are all hungry. We can attend to the burial of Philip afterward."

The little party all repaired to the yacht where the cook soon had a sumptuous breakfast for them, of which they partook with a will, especially Asa.

The latter's wounds were then dressed and were found to be not very dangerous.

After breakfast the party returned to the inclosure where they had left the remains, taking a couple of the men from the yacht along, who dug a grave as best they could with such implements as they found about the yacht, and the body of Philip Thornburg was consigned to earth.

The friends then returned to the yacht and were soon steaming toward New York, where they arrived safely during the night.

The next day Ada and Herbert brought his mother and father together, and it was a happy meeting. In the course of time the old gentleman succeeded in dispelling the dread phantom of his imaginary crime and fully recovered his reason.

Ada and Herbert were married some months later, and lived very happily. They never ceased to count Merriman and Thad among their warmest friends, and Merriman furnished Templeton with his meals as usual.

As for Thad, he secured the old gentleman's signature to the documents which he had recovered from Philip, and forwarded them on to the English attorneys, and in good time the property came into the hands of Mr. Templeton, his wife and happy son and daughter.

And, it is as well to add, Thad Burr was not forgotten.

THE END.

Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men.

Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men;

OR,

The Robin Hood Rivals.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE ROBBER'S FATE.

THE strange spectacle was presented of a man in ambush wearing the uniform of a captain of cavalry in the United States Army, and lying in wait, lasso in hand, to catch a horseman riding toward him at a slow pace.

All unconscious of danger lurking behind the group of rocks by which his trail led, the horseman rode slowly along.

He sat well in his saddle, though he was, apparently, verging upon the Scriptural span of life, of three-score years and ten. He was stoop-shouldered, with a hump almost amounting to a deformity, and upon his neck were clusters of curling, snow-white hair, while large gold-rimmed spectacles shaded his eyes. His dress was elegant, that of a sport in spite of his years.

The one in ambush sat upon his horse, his lariat coiled and in hand ready to throw, one end being fast to his saddle-horn, for he bestrode a Mexican tree with military trappings.

In the fatigue uniform of the cavalry, his shoulder-straps revealed the rank of captain.

He was of fine physique and had a face fearless, handsome and winning.

Soon the advancing horseman, all unsuspecting danger, came within range of the lariat in the hands of the cavalry officer; then it shot out with unerring precision.

There was a bound of the startled horse, a twang of the lariat as it came taut, a fall, a spring from his saddle by the officer, and he bent over the fallen man with a revolver at his head.

The scene that followed was a strange one.

There was an accusation from the officer that the man he had captured was in disguise, that he was none other than Silk Lasso Sam, the Outlaw of the Overland, playing a part with a false hump on his back, an assumed stoop in his shoulders, unneeded spectacles and a wig of snowy hair, for this had been torn from the head, in the fall, and the impostor was revealed.

Hardly had he secured his prisoner when there was heard the sound of approaching horses, and into sight dashed a party of cowboys.

They halted, and saluted at sight of the officer, gazing with surprise and curiosity at the scene.

"Men, you are on your way to the fort, so take this man as your prisoner, for he is none other than Silk Lasso Sam, the Outlaw Chief of the Overland."

"I suspected him, and dogged his steps, when he rode out of the fort with Miss Clarice Carr and Miss Nina De Suro this afternoon."

"He led them into a trap of his outlaws, and the ladies are now his captives, being hurried away to a retreat, while he, a guest of Colonel De Suro under false pretenses, is returning to claim ransom, alleging that he was set free by the outlaws to be able to get the money for payment to obtain his own and the ladies' freedom and safe return to the fort."

"Ask Colonel Dunwoody from me to send my troop after me, for I follow the trail of the outlaws and their captives, to mark it."

"Now take your prisoner, and see that if he escapes you, it will be alone through the grave. Shoot to kill if he attempts to get away."

The cowboys gave a cheer, the officer mounted his horse and dashed away, and the prisoner was left to the mercy of men who he knew longed for an excuse to shoot or hang him.

He had played a bold game in entering the fort in disguise, to capture those whom he sought to get big ransom for, and had lost.

He had been searched by his captor, and some papers were taken from him along with his weapons.

"Pards, I says this man, Silk Lasso Sam, has escaped death too often. ter take any chances."

The speaker was Cowboy Charlie, the leader.

"He has been a terror on ther trails for a long time, and he has kilt too many people jist to git gold. When he were a prisoner at the fort, under sentence of death, his sister come to the fort and she set him free. It was said he pledged her to lead a different life, yet here he is, a few months after, playin' an honest old man, when he is the worst criminal on the frontier."

"If we takes him to the fort he'll escape some way, dead sure; so I says let him escape through ther grave. What does yer say, pards?"

The yell that greeted the speech of the cowboy

captain showed the feeling of the men, and one struck the popular thought when he cried:

"Hang him!"

"Yes, hang him now," came in a chorus of voices, and the Outlaw of the Overland at last knew that his fate was sealed.

CHAPTER II.

THE COWBOY'S RUSE.

"PARDS, I claim the right to send a bullet through his heart, to even up my claim of revenge against him."

"All right, Mustang Monte, fire one shot and that ends all," was Cowboy Charlie's response.

The herders had carried out their determination to hang the outlaw, and had carried him into the timber and a large tree with a low limb had been found.

Over this a lariat was thrown, and the noose was placed about the neck of the prisoner by Mustang Monte, who claimed the right of executioner, in that he said his brother had fallen by the hand of the outlaw chief.

Then the doomed man had been mounted upon his horse, his hands bound behind him, and at a signal from Charlie the animal had been struck a sudden blow and bounding forward had left Sam dangling in mid-air.

Not an appeal for mercy had been made by the outlaw, who had won the admiration of his executioners as he coolly gazed at the preparations for his death, and looked into the grave dug for him without the slightest emotion.

Mustang Monte at once drew his revolver, rode some distance off, and with a yell set his horse into a run. As he went by, fifteen paces distant, he fired one shot; but no one looked to see whether the cowboy had hit or missed, for he never missed.

Monte was a man of really distinguished appearance, with the face of an Adonis, the form of a Hercules and graceful as a woman. He dressed better than his comrades, and had the air of one bred in a different atmosphere than that of the border, yet he was the superior of his companions in throwing a lariat, riding, shooting and in skill as a borderman.

"Now, who plants him? Here are the lots, pards," and Cowboy Charlie shook a number of poker chips in his hat.

The men stepped briskly up. Each drew out a chip, and a smile crossed the faces as they realized that theirs was not the weird duty to bury a man who had been hanged.

"You are elected, Monte," said Cowboy Charlie as that herder drew last and there was only the fatal chip left for him to take.

"So be it, captain; I accept the duty," was the reply, and the cowboys rode away.

Monte gazed after them until they were out of sight; then, seizing the rope bound about the tree upon which the execution had taken place, he lowered the body to the ground with strange gentleness and loosened the noose about the throat.

"That hitch-noose of mine has worked well," he muttered. "The pressure upon the back of the neck, should not have choked him, at least to death, in this time."

"It was difficult to do anything for him and not be seen by the others, and I feared they would discover even that there was no bullet in my revolver when I fired that shot."

"He is insensible, if not dead, and the question is whether I can bring him back to life or not."

"I owe it to him that I should, for he saved my life once, and, outlaw though he has been, I must repay the debt, if it lies within my power."

"If I fetch him back to life again, then he must keep the pledge he made his sister and go far from here—yes, lead a different life."

"Should he not do so, then will I be the first one to hunt him down, for, having canceled my debt to him, as I now am striving to do, it will be my duty to end his career of crime should he begin upon it again."

"Yes, I can fill in the grave, and report that I buried him, and at last there will be an end to Silk Lasso Sam."

And all this while, as he thus mused, Mustang Monte was rubbing the prostrate form and striving to start again the current of life surging through heart and brain.

Two horsemen were riding slowly along the trail leading from Pioneer Post to Pocket City.

They were both men of world-wide fame, one being known as Buffalo Bill, the other as the Surgeon Scout, for though an officer in the army, Dr. Frank Powell had made a record as a scout and Indian-fighter.

In truth, the two men were called along the frontier the Kings of the Border, and well did they deserve the name.

They were firm comrades, and had been for long years, for each owed his life to the other many times over.

Tall, upright, carrying themselves with military air, wearing long hair falling upon their shoulders, Buffalo Bill with mustache and imperial, Frank Powell with mustache alone, the former in buckskin suit, top-boots and sombrero, the latter in cavalry boots, fatigue uniform, and black sombrero with sable plume, well mounted, thoroughly armed, they were indeed Kings of the Border.

Always ready with salute and title for Surgeon Powell before others, Buffalo Bill addressed him as "Pard" and "Frank," or "Doc," when together on a trail.

The scouts of the post, who were known as Buffalo Bill's Merry Men, all loved the surgeon as they did their chief, and were ever glad to have him along with them in scenes of danger, for they knew well what his great skill, deadly aim and indomitable pluck were worth in scenes that tried men's souls.

The two were now going to the vicinity of the mining-camp of Pocket City on a special mission.

There had been rumors of late that the coach driven by Four-in-hand Frank had been held up on the trail out of Pocket City, and the passengers robbed of a considerable sum.

The scout wished to find out if such was the case, and to set Deadshot Dean known as the Hermit Miner, on the watch as a border detective, to hunt down the robber or robbers, and Surgeon Powell was going to see the miner on a friendly visit, merely.

As they rode along they were discussing the noble traits of the miner, and the scenes in and about Yellow Dust Valley, in which they had been deeply interested participants.

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